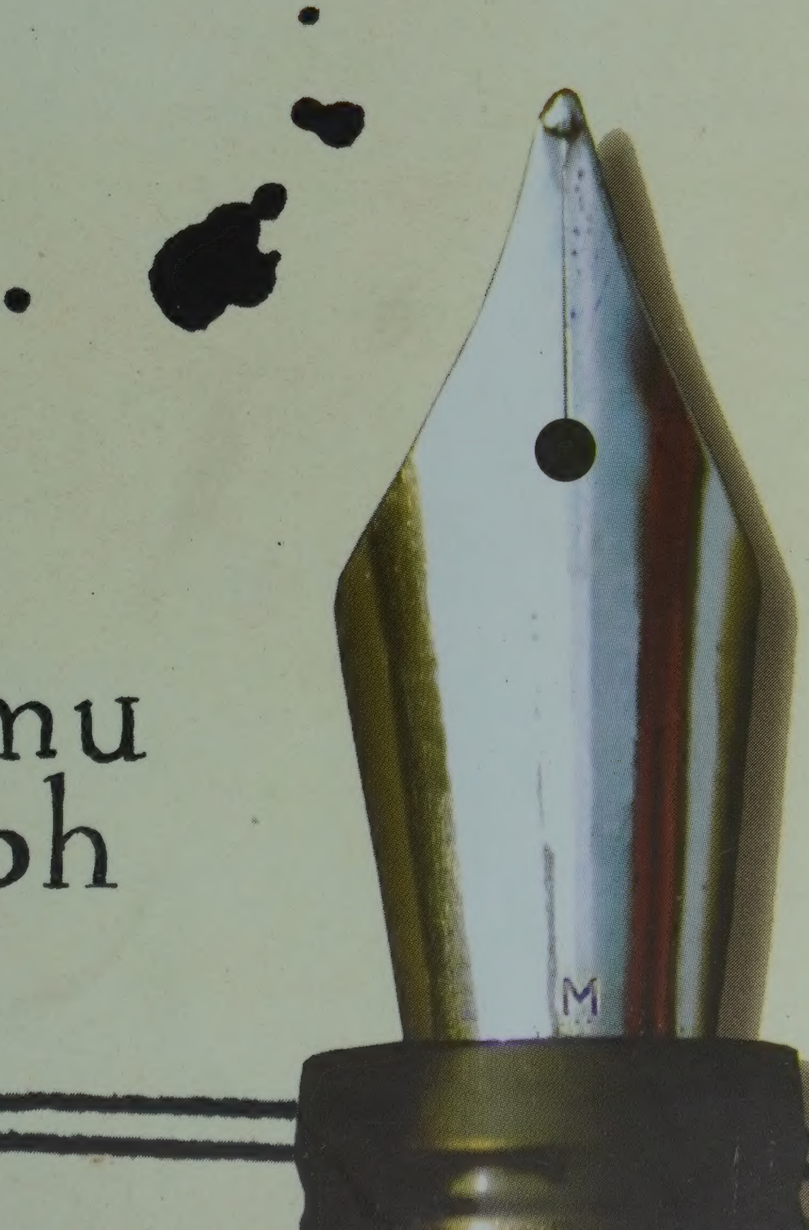
REVISED EDITION

making NEWS

WOMEN in journalism

Ammu
Joseph



PENGUIN BOOKS

MAKING NEWS

Ammu Joseph is an independent journalist based in Bangalore, India. She writes extensively on issues relating to gender, human development and the media. Previous publications include *Storylines: Conversations with Women Writers*, *Just Between Us: Women Speak about their Writing* (with four co-authors), *Terror, Counter-Terror: Women Speak Out*, and *Whose News? The Media and Women's Issues* (with Kalpana Sharma).

Praise for *Making News*

Until recently, finding information on women in the Indian media was a Herculean task. Not any longer, thanks to *Women in Journalism: Making News* ..., the first-of-its-kind collective voice of Indian media women ...

—*IWMFwire*, Newsletter of the International Women's Media Foundation, Washington DC (1999)

... This very readable book offers clear insights into the actual workings of the profession as women have experienced it over decades. And in the process it makes us take a long, hard look at many of our own notions of what good journalism is all about.

—Mrinal Pande, *Outlook* (2000)

... The book is excellent as a synoptic view of the dilemmas which confront women in the media ... (It) ought to be read by a far wider audience than media professionals for the simple reason that it holds a mirror to society. The reflection is pretty unflattering.

—Darryl D'Monte, *The Hindu* (2000)

Ammu Joseph's *Women in Journalism: Making News* creates a space for women journalists to speak about their profession, their work environment, the impact (if any) of gender on their career and on their interaction with news sources, and the interface between their personal and professional lives. *Making News* ... can provoke many a lively discussion among journalists, and is a must read for young men and women who aspire to enter the profession.

—C.K. Meena, *Meantime* (2000)

In 1960, there were just about seven women in journalism in India. Today this number has crossed four thousand. Ammu Joseph's book brings out two aspects in the lives of women journalists: the struggle for an identity as creative individuals and the question of identity in the male-dominated structure of the media. An important book for journalists, and readers as well.

—Kiran Shaheen, Head, Media & Communications,
ActionAid India

An exceptional book, combining solid data and analytical depth to tell a story that resonates with the authentic voices and experiences of women journalists themselves. An added bonus in this eagerly awaited new edition is the inclusion of recent material that demonstrates the practical impact of Ammu Joseph's original work. An inspiring and exemplary accomplishment.

—Margaret Gallagher, international media consultant
and researcher, UK. Author of *Gender Setting: New Agendas for Media Monitoring and Advocacy*

This new edition of Making News is particularly welcome. It builds on the strengths of the earlier edition, which was notable for its generous use of verbatim comments of women throughout Indian journalism, and for its important analysis of the cultural environment in which women journalists operate. In a world now characterized by a non-stop, 24-hour news cycle, the increasingly important role of women in 'making news' deserves this type of expert scrutiny.

—Sheila Gibbons, Editor, *Media Report to Women,* USA.
Co-author of *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism*

How democratic are those who would watch over our democracies? In this brilliantly researched book on women in the media in India, Ammu Joseph casts a damning spotlight on newsrooms in the world's most populous democracy that mirrors the reality across the globe. Women are missing in key areas and positions in the media. They work in a particularly hostile "boys' club" where they face the choice of shaping up or shipping out. What is heartening though about activist research like this is that out of it the participants discover a third option: speaking out. In taking a stand and forming a network, the media women of India enrich their democracy and inspire all of us who believe in making every voice count - and counting that it does.

—Colleen Lowe Morna, Executive Director, Gender Links, South Africa,
Chair, Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network.
Author/editor of *Getting it Right: Gender and Media in Southern Africa*

As someone who studies women's relationship to the news and other media, I would be glad to see this particular book make its way to an international market. Its well-written chapters give a clear and comprehensive report on Indian women journalists' progress and constraints in their profession. And, the personal narratives which illustrate the data add compelling details of women's frustration, triumph and commitment to making a place for gender in news and themselves in Indian newsrooms. The book also provides excellent historical and cultural context to understanding these efforts. Ammu Joseph has brought her experience as a working journalist and feminist leader together with the skills and insights of a researcher in this book. It is a must on every reference shelf and classroom concerned with media, women's liberation, and development journalism.

—Carolyn M. Byerly, Associate Professor, Department of Journalism, Howard University, USA. Co-author/editor of *Women and Media: International Perspectives*

An excellent piece of work that provides an accurate picture of where women are in today's Indian media landscape ... It stimulates the reader to analyse the link between the realities that women media practitioners confront inside and outside the newsroom, and the predominantly negative and stereotypical women's images that the audience see, read, or hear in the media. A must read for women media activists and media scholars!

—Mavic Cabrera-Balleza, Vice President, Women's International Network

For Rhea

Making News

Women in Journalism

AMMU JOSEPH

Under the auspices of
THE MEDIA FOUNDATION
New Delhi

PENGUIN BOOKS

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Foreword

Independent and fair media constitute one of the most critical components of an informed democracy. A free and unrestricted flow of information is essential if people need to make considered choices in their lives and participate fully in the life of a nation. The watchdog role of the media is vital, as is its role as the purveyor of informed, balanced opinion in the social and political spheres both in the private and public sector.

For media to function effectively they need to not only represent all manner of information and opinion, but also to represent the constituents who reflect this diversity. The role of women in the media is therefore an important expression of the strength and health of a democracy, particularly in a country like India, where women account for nearly half the population.

Although more and more women are visible in the Indian media, their presence and representation are far from satisfactory. The situation of women in the media is complex and challenging as it is tied to the larger issues of gender imbalances and inequities in society. As in other public spheres, women in journalism often face an uphill task: their voices are not always heard, they are nearly always kept out of decision making, they frequently face overt and subtle discrimination and thus find themselves consistently disadvantaged at the workplace.

Indian media are today on the threshold of huge and sweeping changes, which will radically redefine the ways in which information is produced, conveyed and accessed. The advent of new technology, media convergence, globalization, and the increasing business compulsions within the media mean that information is controlled and processed in new and different ways.

Although advances in communication technologies have had a positive impact, there is another side to the coin; the control and concentration of technology and media ownership creates a seamless exclusionist world where news and information are both controlled and distorted. There is also the increasing orientation of the media towards consumerism and the market. The trend impacts largely on the most vulnerable and least powerful segments of society. It particularly affects women, who are consumers and producers of media. Therefore, in the Indian newsroom and outside, women in the media have a host of challenges and issues to constantly contend with.

Making News is the remarkable result of years of painstaking research by Ammu Joseph in the uncharted waters of women in the print media. As a journalist, media analyst and author, Ammu's perspectives and analyses are rooted in the realities of editorial and newsroom experience.

This paperback edition, which has an updated introduction and a new chapter on networking at the end of the book, is a rich repository of important material that illuminates the current situation of women in the print media across the country. Ammu's work includes both mainstream English and language newspapers; it encompasses through interviews, anecdotal material and statistics the range and breadth of issues confronting women in Indian journalism. A valuable addition to media studies in India, the book is path breaking in its collation of facts and perspectives that accurately capture the challenges that women journalists constantly encounter.

The vastly divergent views of media professionals that Ammu pulls together in this book demonstrate that, despite many inherent disadvantages, a pluralism reflective of the vibrancy of Indian society exists in the media today. Women in journalism have made and are making significant contributions, each in their own way, regardless of the numerous daily obstacles that they encounter. These obstacles may be the attitudes of male colleagues, the mindset of their bosses or their own personal situations, where they must juggle profession and family in individual and unique ways. Therefore, as Ammu says in her introduction, 'there is no simple answer to the question of whether or not women have come into their own in the Indian media.'

The interviews in this book indicate that, by and large, women in journalism have a positive self-image regardless of their work situation. In spite of the lack of gender sensitivity in most media organizations, women continue to put their shoulders to the wheel. Some do it out of a passionate sense of activism, and some because it just happens to be the job they are in. In newsrooms one often encounters women who are reluctant to be identified specifically with women's issues; in fact, as Ammu points out, a large number resist the label of 'woman journalist'. However, despite their personal predilections, most women journalists definitely relate somewhat to gender issues at their workplace and in their work.

During the course of research Ammu discovers that gender linked disadvantages outweigh the advantages. Whether it is subtle or overt sexual harassment, family pressures or the inability to break the glass ceiling, women in journalism frequently experience discrimination in some form or the other. In the years since the book first appeared, the situation for women has not changed enough even in terms of a 'critical mass' to make a real difference. Interestingly, the Indian media scenario is not too different from the global situation and indeed many of the issues that affect women in other countries are also evident in India. However, gender-based discrimination appears to be more in the Indian language press than in the English media. There are fewer women journalists in the Indian language press; the problems and prejudices that they deal with are many with little recourse to relief.

Although the number of women in the media is steadily growing, the nature of employment is undergoing changes as more and more media organizations function like corporations, where profits are seen as being more crucial than investing in employee benefits and remuneration. Increasingly, with a view to cutting corners, the tendency to opt for contractual employment for journalists is becoming common as opposed to direct employment. This casts a greater burden of uncertainty on women and creates job insecurities, particularly as they often have to compromise their careers for the sake of their families. The drive to economize internally and cut back on benefits in the face of increasing competition is now commonplace. It reflects in poor salaries, low remuneration for freelancers (especially women) and in other measures that affect all journalists.

Another worrying trend is the exclusionist nature of much of contemporary media, especially the English language press, where the promotion of business and corporate interests is paramount. It impinges negatively on women in the profession as well as on women's issues in general. An increasing corporate culture means that specific corporate interests are catered to and particular agendas are upheld against the interests of less powerful segments like women and the poor. Their voices are less likely to be heard in the unholy din of the marketplace. Issues that strengthen democratic practice such as governance, public policy debates and the interests of the disadvantaged in society find less and less space in the print media, reinforcing the gross inequities that already exist.

Women in the media are often at the receiving end of this new consumerist and corporate culture that is now becoming an imperative in many newspaper managements. Their inputs as journalists are restricted, and what is worse is that there is less and less choice available to them as practitioners to find space for the kinds of stories they may want to tell as reporters or the different perspectives they may want to include as editors. As it is women who tend, by and large, to voice these concerns, it makes the practice of a certain kind of journalism difficult, if not impossible. Even in the most highly regarded national dailies it is now commonplace for the circulation and advertising departments to regularly influence and sometimes even dictate editorial content.

Apart from the kind of work that women may end up doing in this era of unrelenting commercialization, their positions also become more tenuous as their work and contributions to their organizations are not always taken into consideration in male dominated hierarchical media structures. Even senior journalists find it difficult to climb the corporate ladder in this situation. The glass ceiling rests firm on the rooftops of media houses, particularly the larger ones that function more like corporations than newspaper offices. Challenges to male power structures within newspapers are usually met with extreme hostility and stiff resistance. Even the defence of one's own work can sometimes be perceived as defiance and 'rebellion'. In a recent case a bright young correspondent who had held her own in the face of threats from her editor had ultimately to resign from the organization as she found a groundswell of hostility (including from some female co-workers), which made it impossible for her to continue to work in that office.

While such instances may not be common, it is clear that women's capabilities to confront abuse of power within news organizations need to be strengthened. Issues like these are highlighted from the direct personal experiences of women journalists and debated throughout the book. Although the current state of women in newsrooms leaves much room for improvement, the emergence of a non-hierarchical body like the Network of Women in Media, India, which is discussed in Annexure 1 at the end of the book, is an important collective step in the movement towards empowering women media professionals in the country. When women begin to claim their own space, define their own issues and agendas and mobilize themselves for equal participation in the public and professional sphere, it greatly strengthens democratic practice in society. This book makes a vital and significant contribution in terms of reflecting and depicting these pressing concerns. Ultimately it is the voices and experiences of women themselves, varied, strong and independent who can show the way ahead.

Nirmala Lakshman
Joint Editor, *The Hindu*
Chennai

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Introduction

An extraordinary series of articles appeared in the leading Malayalam daily, *Malayala Manorama,* from 30 January to 3 February 2004. Published under the general headline, 'How Kerala behaves with women', the special reports exposed the difficulties and distress experienced by women negotiating public spaces on their own in the most literate state in India, widely promoted as God's Own Country.

Six women reporters of the paper travelled incognito across Kerala from 14 to 20 January to document what women routinely undergo in a state acclaimed the world over for its achievements in human development, including women's education. Touring cities and towns across the state separately and unescorted, they encountered diverse forms of sexual harassment, ranging from goggling and leering through lewd comments and gestures to exhibitionism and physical molestation. The dramatic reports, supported by quantitative surveys commissioned by the newspaper, had a tremendous impact on Kerala's society, triggering unprecedented responses from the public, members of the legislative assembly and the government.

The reporters responsible for the series—K. R. Meera, M. Vineetha Gopi, Rani George, Subha Joseph, Neetha Mary James and Gayathri Muralidharan—expressed satisfaction with what they had managed to accomplish. According to Meera, who led the investigative team, 'Our aim was to find out how safe Kerala is for women. We had carefully planned each phase of the investigation. We had a dress code and we carried heavy bags to give the impression that we were serious travellers with definite destinations. Our male colleagues often helped us by following us on our beats.'[1]

Women journalists in Kerala, and the *Malayala Manorama*, have obviously come a long way over the past couple of decades. As mentioned elsewhere in this book, there were very few women in journalism in the state in the 1980s, a former editor of the paper made it clear at the time that he did not think journalism was an appropriate career for women, and the first woman to join the staff of the *Manorama* daily—K.R. Meera—was hired as late as in 1993. The *Manorama* editor was, of course, not the only media decision-maker in the state to have a dim view of women in journalism in those days: a former resident editor of the local edition of a national English daily and at least one other senior journalist have been cited in this book expressing similar opinions at the time.

It is remarkable that in a state from which working women, especially nurses and teachers, have long travelled to different parts of the country and the world, the media have been so slow to accept women. Even as late as in the last quarter of 2000, the proportion of women on the staff of four major dailies in the state, both Malayalam and English (*Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi, The New Indian Express* and *The Hindu*), was extremely low: 8.5per cent among reporters and sub-editors (or copy editors), 2.8 per cent among chief reporters and chief sub-editors, 4.4 per cent among deputy news editors, and none among news editors, not to mention more senior positions.[2]

However, the situation appears to have changed for the better in the intervening years. It is estimated that there are currently about eighty women journalists in Kerala. A high-profile, state-level conference of women journalists in Thiruvananthapuram in October 2002, facilitated by the newly gender-conscious Kerala Union of Working Journalists, brought together nearly 100 participants, including student and trainee journalists, a majority of who endorsed the idea of a state-level network.

There is further evidence of the new confidence and assertiveness now perceptible among media women in Kerala. In November 2004, for instance, several women journalists from both print and television actively participated in protests by media professionals against the violent attacks on their colleagues by supporters of a government minister implicated in one of the several infamous sex scandals that have surfaced in the state over the past decade—in this case, the sexual exploitation of a minor girl. The recently formed Women Journalists Forum, Kerala, also wrote a letter to Congress Party leader Sonia Gandhi, signed by a dozen representatives, seeking her intervention in getting the Congress-led coalition government in the state to probe the assault on media persons, including two women journalists, as well as the alleged involvement of the minister in the sordid case.

According to them, V.M. Deepa, a television reporter who was injured in one of the attacks, along with twenty-five colleagues, was not only chased and beaten by lathi-wielding political workers, but also verbally abused in vulgar language. In addition, she continued to receive anonymous threatening calls even after the incident. Her colleagues believe that Deepa was specially targeted because, besides reporting on the case, she had responded to the victim's plea for help by assisting her in securing shelter in a short-stay home for women in distress.

The Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI) extended support to fellow journalists in Kerala by issuing a statement protesting the attacks on media workers, including two women. Interestingly, both the NWMI and the Women Journalists Forum emerged from a process catalysed by this book, first published in 2000. (See Annexure I)

In an even more recent development, a two-day get-together ('koottaima') of women journalists in the state ended with the formation of the Network of Women in Media, Kerala (NWM-K). About twenty-five women from print and visual media participated in the meeting, which had been initiated by the State Commission for Women, and took place in Thattekkad (Ernakulam district) at the end of November. Even as they were discussing the need for a professional network, yet another episode of media-bashing took place, with journalists in Thiruvananthapuram being roughed up by the police and anti-social elements. The issue of a safe work environment for journalists had been a major focus of discussions at the meeting, with V.M. Deepa recounting her experience of being attacked by political workers and providing fellow participants with a detailed background of the controversial case. After animated and exhaustive discussions on a wide range of issues, most participants came to the conclusion that networking was essential, now more than ever. The newly formed network has rotating coordinators in different centres as well as at the state level.

In February 2005 the NWM-K collaborated in a meeting of women activists, lawyers and media professionals in Kochi to discuss the implications of the Kerala High Court's controversial judgement in the infamous Suryanelli sex racket case, in which a school girl had been sexually exploited by several men during a forty-day period in 1996. A Special Court set up by the government had convicted the thirty-five persons accused in the case but a two-member Division Bench of the High Court recently exonerated all but one of them.

The Gender Factor

Does the newfound initiative and self-assurance of media women in a state that was a slow starter in this respect indicate that all is well with women journalists in India today? Is gender now irrelevant in the Indian media context? It would appear so from the following exchanges during an online chat in April 2003, organized by the US-based International Women's Media Foundation and hosted by Bachi Karkaria, a senior and successful journalist who was at the time associate editor of the prominent English daily, *The Times of India*:[3]

Q: What is necessary for a woman journalist in India to become successful—having a godfather or being a part of the cocktail circle? My experience tells me that there is no appreciation of hard work and efficiency. Why is a woman in the newsroom considered a fool who need not be appreciated and considered for more responsibilities?

A: No, ... , you can make it entirely on the strength of your merit and commitment. Godfathers or cocktail savvy aren't much use when you actually have to deliver, because there's a bunch of discerning readers out there who can't be fooled. Why should a woman not be taken seriously in the newsroom if she is good at her work? Let's not make gender an issue at our end.

Q: What is the biggest challenge to women in the Indian media?

A: Biggest challenge: their own attitude. They should stop thinking gender and start thinking professional ...

Yet here is an example of the current realities that many women journalists across the country frequently have to deal with. According to a bright young journalist in Ranchi, 'It's permanent, continuous night shift for everyone on the desk' in her organization. At the time of writing (2004), she had been working from 5 p.m. to 1.30-2 a.m. or later every day without a break for months on end. 'Since there's only one vehicle to drop everyone after night duty, it takes anything between an hour to two hours to get home,' she said. 'We know this is a violation of labour laws, not to mention human rights, but there's little we can do about it since the organization is perpetually short-staffed.'

'The hours affect women more than men,' she pointed out. 'We have to wait for the office vehicle to drop us home safely, whereas our male colleagues can drive their own vehicles at any hour of the night. As a result, even after completing our own work, we women end up having to wait until all the pages are completed and everything is in place for the next day's edition, because that's when the office transport actually leaves. You tend to stop thinking about rights and so on when even the most basic facilities and comforts, such as a good night's rest, are denied to you on a routine and prolonged basis.'

She got her first decent pay hike only in mid-2004, after four years on the job, and even with that her salary amounted to just Rs 10,000 per month. She had never enjoyed the pleasure of a promotion, despite hard work over long hours, as well as the fact that her seniors obviously appreciated her capabilities since they gave her key pages to handle. The irony is that she was working for the local edition of a leading 'national' English newspaper, not some small, struggling 'regional' rag. And, significantly, this was her experience even though she is clearly committed to the profession. For example, although she had little time to spare for additional work, she applied for and was awarded a media fellowship, instituted by a private foundation, to write a series of investigative articles on gender issues.

The young journalist also reported that Hindi dailies in Jharkhand rarely employ women. The few women who do work with them are stringers whose services can be terminated at any time. According to some of the women, whether based in small towns like Ghatshila or cities such as Bokaro, they are paid less than Rs 100 for a story. The monthly earnings of a woman stringer writing for the leading Hindi dailies in the state range between Rs 1000 and Rs 3000, although they work as hard, if not more, than their male counterparts.

Even the local edition of a well-known English daily had two women stringers on its rolls until recently. Despite several years of experience, one of them was often assigned menial tasks that were technically not part of her job description; male stringers were rarely burdened with the kind of work that was regularly thrust upon her. There were other apparently gender-based discrepancies between male and female stringers/reporters: the women reportedly started at a lower level of remuneration and were never confirmed in their jobs, while men who joined the organization later were made full-fledged reporters.

This account of the situation of women journalists in Jharkhand is in the past tense because my young informant recently quit her job to move to another city and state, and the two female stringers are no longer with the daily where they were ill-treated. While one reportedly resigned after being asked to leave, the other was fired, apparently paying the price for informally complaining about sexual harassment to her female colleagues and requesting them to intervene in some way.[4]

It is difficult, not to mention unfair, to conclude that all the women who encounter such problems in the course of their media careers simply lack merit or commitment, or that all their troubles stem from thinking about gender rather than professionalism. And these are not isolated experiences; similar stories are told by women journalists in several different parts of the country, especially outside the main metropolises but also, unfortunately, in major media centres like New Delhi.

Complex Reality

The fact is that there is no simple answer to the question of whether or not women have come into their own in the Indian media. As I pointed out in a 2002 paper,[5] the apocryphal story about six blind persons and their descriptions of an elephant, based on the part of the animal they were able to touch and feel, comes to mind in the course of any endeavour to represent any aspect of India. This sub-continental nation is, arguably, the mother of all elephants, and the Indian media constitute one of her sizeable pachydermatous progeny: both defy definitive description.

I began the paper with three examples of women journalists in the thick of some of the most dramatic events of that period:

- On 14 October 2002, the top story on the front page of a multi-edition Indian newspaper, datelined Baghdad, was by the political editor of the English daily, reporting from 'inside Iraq'—a woman.

- Around the same time the previous year, women were conspicuous by their presence in the Indian media, covering the events of '9/11' and thereafter, and analysing their implications—as correspondents and commentators, editors and anchors, interviewers and hosts of current affairs programmes, especially on some high profile television news channels and in the indigenous English language press.
- Earlier in 2002, women played an active role in covering the communal conflagration in Gujarat. As the media provided on-the-spot reports from the internal battleground, female bylines (not all of them nationally known) were very much in evidence in several newspapers and newsmagazines, and female broadcasters regularly appeared on a number of television news and current affairs programmes, focussing public attention on the sectarian violence and its aftermath. Women were also prominent as media commentators, analysing developments in Gujarat as they unfolded. Like a number of their male colleagues, some women reporters were threatened and at least one was physically attacked in the course of doing their jobs under difficult circumstances. The fearless reporting of local journalists, including women, was particularly commendable because they had good reason to be anxious about incurring the wrath of violence-prone individuals and organizations by revealing the ugly truth about the carnage, especially since they continued to live and work in the communally charged environment.

As I then pointed out, these positive examples of women journalists courageously covering conflict tell one, bright side of the story of women in the Indian media. They obviously do not tell the whole story. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to encapsulate women's experiences in India's vast and complex media scenario, within which the press alone is so enormous and diverse.

The total number of registered newspapers in the country was as high as 55,780[6] in March 2003.[7] Newspapers and periodicals here are published in as many as 101 languages and dialects.[8] According to a recent estimate, the 350 largest Indian newspapers employ a total of about 5000 reporters, 2000 full-time correspondents, 5000 stringers and 5000 editorial staff.[9] This adds up to a total of 17,000 journalist employees spread across a tiny fraction of the Indian print media.

Clearly, as I have pointed out elsewhere in the book, nothing short of a major sample survey, if not a census, would provide a realistic estimate of the number of journalists in India, the percentage of women among them, and a more or less comprehensive picture of their situation.

Recent Data

Nevertheless, the few surveys that have been conducted since this book was first published, as well as anecdotal evidence gathered in the process of network-building over the past few years,[10] suggest that most of the experiences and observations reported in it—both positive and negative—still hold good.

Take, for example, a pilot survey designed by the Network to Empower Women Journalists (NEWJ)—later renamed Network of Women in Media, Bangalore—and facilitated, collated and analysed by Voices in 2001.[11] The survey covered 247 women journalists in various parts of the country who voluntarily responded to the questionnaire. Since the convenience sample was relatively small and largely self-selected, the findings cannot be taken as truly representative. However, they do provide useful indications of the situation prevailing at the turn of the century.

Nearly one-third of the respondents (29 per cent) claimed that they had experienced gender-based discrimination. More than half of them (51 per cent) cited work allocation as the most common area of discrimination, with promotion (45 per cent) and recruitment (21 per cent) coming next as points at which they felt disadvantaged by gender. Interestingly, a number of respondents reported more than one form of gender discrimination.

Fewer women under thirty-five reported experiences of discrimination: 21 per cent, compared to 34 per cent among those in the over-35 age group. This could be good news, suggesting that discrimination has decreased with time, or not, since it may mean that older journalists experience discrimination as they get closer to the proverbial glass ceiling.

More women working in Indian language media reported gender discrimination (28.3 per cent) than those in the English media (21.5 per cent). Significantly, however, the difference between these two categories was considerably less than the gap between the overall figure for language media and that for Hindi media alone (41.5 per cent). This implies that there are more variations within the so-called regional language media than is commonly acknowledged.

Eight per cent of the respondents claimed to have faced sexual harassment. In what could be a significant piece of data, another 7 per cent chose not to answer that particular question. Further, only 8 per cent reported the availability of in-house committees to deal with complaints of sexual harassment at the workplace (legally mandated by a 1997 judgement of the Supreme Court of India). Interestingly, this question had a high rate of 'no response', which could indicate that many women journalists are unaware of whether or not such a committee exists (even though the judgement places the onus on employers to ensure that both male and female employees know what constitutes sexual harassment and what options are available to victims of such behaviour).

A more recent study on the 'Status of Women Journalists in India', initiated by the National Commission for Women and coordinated by the Press Institute of India, reported similar findings.[12] The survey, conducted by a team of women journalists during 2002-03, covered a convenience sample of 410 women spread across nineteen states.

One-fifth of them (20.5 per cent) said women were discriminated against when it came to promotions, with nearly half (45.5 per cent) convinced that sex/gender was the primary reason for their being bypassed. According to the study, 8.4 per cent of the respondents reported that they were forced to leave a media organization because of discrimination in promotions.

Gender-based job segregation also emerged as a key issue for many respondents, with nearly a quarter (24.7 per cent) reporting that they do not have access to all areas of work, and that women are still concentrated in areas of journalism traditionally reserved for them, such as lifestyle, fashion, the arts, education and, of course, gender. At the same time, an overwhelming majority (87.3 per cent) believe that women are capable of handling all subject areas covered by the media.

The NCW/PII survey reinforces the impression gained in the course of interviews for this book as well as during subsequent women journalists' workshops[13] that sexual harassment is far from unknown within media houses. The researchers found that it was a major concern for most respondents, with nearly a quarter (22.7 per cent) willing to state on the record that they had been sexually harassed either at the workplace or in connection with their work. While an additional eight per cent were unsure about whether or not their experience constituted sexual harassment, a number of respondents refused to respond to the question or comment on the issue in the questionnaire.

Of those who admitted to having been sexual harassed, almost a third (31.5 per cent) reported that the experience had 'seriously' undermined their confidence and affected their work, while a quarter (24 per cent) said it had affected them 'mildly', and a surprisingly substantial proportion (41.3 per cent) claimed that it had had no effect on them. According to the authors, these findings suggest that 'sexual harassment is part of the work culture in media organizations in India.'

This is further borne out by the fact that only 15.2 per cent of women who had experienced sexual harassment had made a formal complaint about it. Of those who did not, over 10 per cent cited fear of intimidation, victimization and/or job loss as the inhibiting factor. Significantly, a much larger number (40.2 per cent) said they did not complain because they felt sexual harassment was not taken seriously in their organizations and/ or that their complaint would be seen as trivial or exaggerated. Nearly a quarter of all respondents (22.8 per cent) believe that sexual harassment is tolerated and is an accepted part of their organization's culture. Further, a disturbing 14 per cent said they had no confidence in the management's willingness or ability to take action against such conduct.

The absence of gender-specific facilities, including those mandated by law, and lack of awareness about such facilities were reported by both these surveys. For example, as many as 17.5 per cent of the respondents in the NCW/PII study apparently did not know whether or not maternity leave was available to them. Such ignorance is particularly surprising among journalists, who are supposed to be in the business of information. In the NWMB/ Voices survey, only about half the respondents claimed to have access to maternity leave and a shocking 39 per cent said they did not have access to separate toilets for women in their offices.

Problem Areas

As reported elsewhere in this book, gender-based problems appear to be particularly acute in sections of the Indian language press, which reaches a much larger proportion of the country's reading public than the more conspicuous English press. For example, commenting on 'the place of women in genuine journalist roles in Indian-language newspapers', media and South Asia scholar Robin Jeffrey concluded: 'Their numbers ... were scant, the jobs few and the prejudices against them formidable.'[14]

The two surveys mentioned above suggest that things have not altered significantly since he drew that conclusion. However, there have been some changes for the better, at least in certain places and sections of the media.

For example, during interviews for this book and discussions at the 2000-02 workshops, women from Andhra Pradesh had painted a bleak picture of the media scenario in the state, especially with regard to employment and working conditions in the Telugu press. They reported that the virtual monopoly achieved by one publishing house had led to the closure or impoverishment of several others. As a result, they said, jobs had become scarce and insecure, and the number of women journalists in the state had actually decreased. To make matters worse, they alleged, many media houses tried to get around the statutory wages stipulated by government-appointed Wage Boards by using inaccurate job descriptions and false designations to underpay journalists who were not in a position to protest in view of the widespread unemployment that then prevailed.

But the situation has obviously improved since then, at least in terms of job opportunities. Women journalists from Andhra Pradesh were happy to report at a workshop in Mumbai in January 2004[15] that most of them were now gainfully employed, thanks mainly to the proliferation of Telugu television channels. However, at a workshop in Hyderabad in January 2005[16] they raised questions about the roles to which women tend to be assigned, and even confined, within television (e.g., presenters rather than directors/producers).

Further, a presentation on women in the regional media at the Hyderabad workshop called attention to the continuing disparity between journalists' wages in the regional and English press, as well as print and broadcast media. It also highlighted the new tendency within the Andhra Pradesh media to replace experienced journalists with fresh recruits, possibly because the latter can be paid lower wages (reportedly averaging Rs 2500-4000 per month). Women working on the night shift are offered neither transport nor dormitory facilities.

To make matters worse, many media managements reportedly get around other statutory obligations by not issuing appointment orders/letters to journalists. According to participants, a major media house issues appointment letters in the name of a news agency to avoid having to extend benefits to employees. They pointed out that such practices create job insecurity, which has multiple repercussions, not only on individual journalists but the profession as a whole. Another unethical practice highlighted by several participants was of journalists being asked to double up as advertisement executives (with salaries sometimes being tied to ad revenue). It is obvious that this can and, in all probability, does compromise the independence and integrity of media professionals and, therefore, of the media.

Yet another issue raised by several participants was the discrepancy in the respect accorded to English and regional language journalists, with the former enjoying far greater status even within a media house publishing in both English and Telugu. This is despite the fact that the latter actually have to work much harder, with multiple editions being brought out every day (in some cases, a new edition every half an hour). Unlike their counterparts in the English press, they also have to handle multiple tasks (including translation, composition and pagination).

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Another issue originally flagged in this book has also been reinforced by subsequent observations: the poor representation—if not virtual absence—of women from traditionally disadvantaged communities among media professionals.

There is little data on the socio-economic and cultural composition of the Indian press corps, let alone that of its female component. However, circumstantial evidence suggests that the representation of scheduled castes and tribes in the media workforce is not only minimal but, also, completely disproportionate to their presence in the population. As Jeffrey puts it, 'On the overwhelming majority of Indian newspapers in the 1990s there simply were no Dalits.' A number of recent articles confirm that there has been little improvement in that situation either.[17]

With gender compounding the disadvantages of caste, women from Dalit—not to mention Adivasi—communities clearly have even less access to media employment than men from the same or similar social groupings. Likewise, the representation of some religious minorities, notably Muslims, in the media is relatively marginal. Here, again, women from these communities are undoubtedly doubly disadvantaged.

Only a minuscule 0.4 per cent of those who responded to the NWMB/Voices survey identified themselves as Scheduled Caste. And although a respectable 15.4 per cent were from religious minorities, there were very few Muslims among them (Christians formed the majority among the minorities in this instance). Significantly perhaps, although only 4 per cent admitted that they had faced disadvantages within the profession on account of caste or religion, nearly a third (32 per cent) chose not to respond to that question.

According to the NCW/PII report, ' ... the industry can boast of only modest gains on the issue of diversity, since the upper class-upper caste network continues to dominate women who have entered the profession. Despite being a diverse and complex nation like India, women from minority communities and from the underprivileged sections of society are missing from the pressroom.'

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The special situation of the media—and media women—in the north-eastern states, highlighted by participants from the region at the women journalists' workshop in Shillong (September 2001)[18] has been recorded in the NCW/PII study, too. Within a media context where most newspapers (other than a few in Assam) belong to the small and tiny sectors, are typically run in an ad hoc rather than professional manner, exist primarily to serve the needs and interests of the numerous ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse communities that make up the population of the seven states in the region, and operate in a situation of perennial (often violent) conflict, gender is only one of the many problematic factors that journalists have to contend with.

Nevertheless, according to the NCW/PII report, the majority of the approximately thirty-five women journalists in the region work on the desk and only one third of these are permanent, full-time employees (the rest are 'permanent part-timers' or employed on contract). Nearly three-quarters of them (72 per cent) earn salaries in the range of Rs 1500-5000, while seven per cent earn even less. With 40 per cent having never been promoted and 31 per cent promoted only once, it is not surprising that none of them are in senior positions.

The study further revealed that while most women journalists in the north-east say there is no gender discrimination at the workplace, they do suggest that the gender bias prevailing in society as a whole is reflected in the media, too, especially in terms of the beats to which women are traditionally assigned and the fact that some newspaper houses have an unwritten policy against employing women as reporters. It is significant in this context that a case of sexual harassment in an Assamese newspaper became a cause celebre even at the national level in 2003, with local media organizations and human/women's rights bodies, as well as the NWMI, calling for action.

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At a more general level, while there is no doubt that the number of women in journalism is on the rise across the country and that they are making their presence felt in the media, women's capacity to influence the agenda, practice and output of the media is still limited by several factors. For one, the number of women in key decision-making positions is still relatively small. For another, many successful media women tend to adopt or, at least, adapt to the prevailing values and norms of the profession, like the majority of their counterparts elsewhere, in the media as well as in other professions.

A third inhibiting factor is the apparent shift in the media's priorities and preoccupations over the past decade of heightened commercialization and corporatization. As reported elsewhere in this book, the increasingly market-driven nature of the media has led to a boom in celebrity and lifestyle journalism and a drastic decrease in the time and space available for serious coverage of events and issues that affect large sections of society, including women. As a result, even senior journalists who are mindful of the social responsibilities of the media are finding it ever more difficult to place such matters on the media agenda.

A related and disturbing trend, noted in the book and reaffirmed in subsequent interactions, is the high rate of drop-out among women journalists, including many who have racked up valuable experience in the field. In general, their reasons for opting out of full-time employment in the media industry have more to do with the unchanging systems and structures of media organizations, the changing nature and substance of work within the media, as well as the problematic attitudes and behaviour of media managements and colleagues, than with their own predilections.

Finally, women's presence and influence in the area of media policy and standards still remains limited, not only within media organizations but also in professional forums and regulatory bodies. For instance, of the eighteen elected and nominated members of the newly constituted Executive Committee of the Editors' Guild of India, an apex body of media professionals, only three are women.[19] The nine ex-officio members—all former Presidents of the Guild—are all men. So the ratio is really 27:3. In other words, the Guild has nine times more male than female members.

Then there is the example of the Press Council of India, a statutory, quasi-judicial body set up by an Act of Parliament to function as a watchdog of the press, to uphold and preserve the freedom of the press, and to maintain and improve the standards of the press. It has twenty-eight members, of who twenty represent the press and are nominated by media organizations and/or news agencies, five are members of the two houses of Parliament, and three are supposed to represent the cultural, literary and legal fields.

The composition of the PCI (Eighth Term), as reflected on its website, suggests that gender representation, let alone balance, is not a major consideration.[20] The chairperson (customarily a retired judge) is a man; the six editor members are all male; among the seven working journalists (other than editors) all but one are male; the six members representing owners or managers of newspapers are all men; the single representative of a news agency is a man; all the three nominees of the University Grants Commission, the Bar Council of India and the Sahitya (or Literary) Academy are male; and only one of the five nominated members of parliament is a woman. In other words, there are two female members to twenty-six males.

Global Context

The good news, if it can be called that, is that many of these issues are not peculiar to India. Recent international documents and books[21] suggest that such concerns and trends are very much in evidence across much of the world, albeit in different forms and at different levels.

It is salutary to be reminded that—despite today's theoretical sophistication, and even though the global political and communication environment has changed dramatically over the past twenty or thirty years—the issues that need to be addressed are fundamentally the same as ever. They still revolve around the most basic questions of 'power, values, access and exclusion ... ', wrote Margaret Gallagher, the well-known international media consultant and researcher, in her background paper for the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Women and the Media (Beirut, November 2002).

'It is undeniable,' she continued in the section on media employment and decision-making, 'that women are now "present" as an important middle-level cohort of producers, directors, journalists and reporters in the media of many countries round the world ... However, the increased presence of women on the screen and in a few other high-profile positions almost certainly contributes to a gulf between perceptions and reality ... '

Citing national as well as international studies, her paper discussed the continuing reality of the glass ceiling, the male-defined 'rules of the game' that determine journalistic culture, as well as the persistence of gender-based discrimination in media organizations, all of which militate against women's advancement and empowerment in the media. Similarly, the section on access to employment and decision-making in the Final Report of the UN EGM pointed out that 'although the percentage of female journalists and other middle-level media professionals has risen substantially ... research continues to document women's absence from senior decision-making jobs in the media worldwide ... The success of a small number of highly visible media women sometimes obscures the fact that, for the majority, opportunities remain severely limited. There are particular barriers to women in certain sections of the media ... And certain categories of women, such as women of colour and ethnic minority women as well as women from socially excluded groups, are marginal in terms of access to the profession.'

'Obstacles to women's advancement in media occupations include social roles and attitudes, lack of institutional support that would allow the reconciliation of family and professional responsibilities, sexual harassment, lack of training, exclusion from male networks where decisions are often made, as well as working hours and (in some countries) shift work,' the report continued. It also noted the 'high attrition rate of women from the media industry, even among those in high-level positions' and discusses some of the complex reasons for this trend, including 'women's perception and experience of discrimination; frustration arising from their limited impact on news priorities and other media content; a feeling that they can regain autonomy and make a bigger contribution from working outside the media'. The 'increasing market orientation of media systems', 'the growing cult of celebrity or personality journalism, associated with heavy commercialisation of media', shifting 'the emphasis away from quality news and information to sound bite and entertainment news' were the additional factors mentioned in this context.

The Final Analysis

However, none of this means that women in the media—in India or elsewhere—are merely whining and complaining about their lot. Quite the contrary. As reported in this book, Indian women have not only arrived and made themselves both visible and audible in the media, but many of them have gained the admiration and respect of the public as well as colleagues through their work in several areas of journalism, including those they were traditionally excluded from. Most of them are clearly determined to stay on in journalism—in one way or another, within or outside media organizations—despite the trials and tribulations that too many continue to face.

A number of them have won professional awards both within the country and internationally. Young women entering the profession today have a wide range of role models to choose from. And they are entering the profession in droves, with a high rate of female enrolment in most journalism schools across the country.

According to the NCW/PII report, even where the numbers are low, as in the regional press, and discrimination between male and female employees is a reality, the study shows that women journalists still infuse their careers with a hopeful and positive attitude. Many of them are committed to contributing to the industry, often against all odds and far beyond the expectations of managements and co-workers. In fact, women report that, too many times, their goals are stifled long before they even have a chance to flourish. Despite this the growing number of women entering the media profession and continuing to pursue careers, demonstrates their determination to keep voices of women alive.

A journalist from Jharkhand has been quoted in the report as saying, 'Though women are well represented in the media their voices are largely unheard. They are supposed to report on the predicaments of society at large but when it comes to themselves, they are seldom heard.' This book was, and still is, an attempt to record the experiences and opinions of women in the media across the country and to ensure that the voices of women media professionals are indeed heard.

Ammu Joseph
March 2005

Although five years have passed since the hardback edition of this book was published, and a few changes have occurred here and there, the overall situation vis-a-vis women in the media is not significantly different today. Read together with the new foreword, introduction and annexure, freshly written for this paperback edition, the original preface and chapters that follow form a composite whole, telling the story of the women behind the bylines in all its variety and vitality.

Preface

The last decade of the millennium has been an eventful one for the mass communications media in India. The spurt in the number and visibility of Indian media women is but one of several significant developments in the media here during this period. However, it is an interesting and complex phenomenon which deserves closer scrutiny than it has received so far.

It is only fitting that The Media Foundation, New Delhi, took the initiative to make an exploration of this theme possible. The Foundation, established in 1979, instituted the annual Chameli Devi Jain Award for Outstanding Women Journalists as far back as in 1981, in recognition of what its members perceived even then as the growing participation and outstanding contribution of women to the Indian media. About two years ago, B.G. Verghese, chairperson of the Foundation, mooted the idea of a book on Indian women in journalism to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the Foundation and the eighteenth anniversary of the Award. It fell to me to take up the challenge.

I have attempted, in this book, to provide an overview of the situation, experiences and perspectives of women working as journalists in different parts of the country, in the English as well as the Indian language press, at various levels in the editorial hierarchy and in different branches of journalism.

Overviews are, of course, inherently dangerous, especially in a country as large, diverse and complex as India. And the press in India reflects much of the variety and plurality of the society it serves. My task was made more difficult by the fact that there is little available and accessible information on women's participation in the Indian media, particularly in terms of history and statistics. Under the circumstances, I have relied heavily on the knowledge, experiences and opinions of women currently active in the profession.

I have deliberately restricted my inquiry to women in the print media, despite the high visibility of female anchors and reports on television news and current affairs programmes today. I think the subject of women in the audio-visuals media requires separate treatment because of the essential differences between these and the print media, certainly in India.

For one, the presence and role of women in the national television and radio networks (Doordarshan and Akashvani) are influenced by the fact that these media are government owned and controlled and, therefore, guided by official policies relating to public sector personnel. Secondly, privately produced news and current affairs programming is a relatively recent phenomenon here and it may be premature to draw conclusions from current patterns of employment. Thirdly, the question of women's visibility on television news is recognized worldwide as a fairly complex issue which involves factors not always applicable to print journalism.

The book is, therefore, based primarily on interviews with nearly 200 Indian women working as journalists in the print media in as many parts of the country as I could get to. In addition, I received thirty-five responses to the dozens of questionnaires I sent out, especially to presswomen in places I could not personally visit (including a few working overseas). Some women who have either switched from print to television or straddle the two media are also included.

Additionally, the book incorporates information and insights gleaned from the scanty literature available on the subject and, of course, my own experiences and observations as a journalist and media-watcher over the past twenty-two years. The book has no pretensions to being the product of any systematic or substantive, let alone academic, research.

While I have attempted to cover as wide a spectrum of journalists as possible, the admittedly arbitrary sample can be questioned on a number of counts. The choice was dictated by a number of clearly unscientific factors: professional placement, personal acquaintance, mutually convenient availability, and referrals (in places where I was dependent on one or two local contacts). There are many on my long lists whom I was, regretfully, unable to contact and I have no doubt that there are many, many others who should have been included and could have contributed valuable insights.

However, this book is not meant to be a who's who of Indian women in journalism. Rather, it is an exploration of the world of journalism in India through the eyes of women situated at different vantage points in the profession. This is why I had no difficulty in agreeing to the few requests for anonymity that I received and see no harm in safeguarding the identities of others who have shared sensitive information of opinions with me, whether or not they have specifically asked me to do so. In the context of this book, the 'who' is the least significant of the traditional '5 Ws and an H' (who, what, when, where, why and how) of reporting.

Further, this book is not about what women who are journalists/journalists who are women should or should not be doing (for womankind or anyone else). Rather, it is about where female media professionals are currently placed in the press, what they are and are not doing, why they think this is the case, what they feel about the situation and how they view the profession as a whole and their role in it.

I see the book as a preliminary effort to examine the present situation of women in what is still an important section of the Indian mass media: the press, in English and other Indian languages. This happens to be the section of the media in which Indian women have had a substantial presence for several decades and to which they have made notable contributions over the years.

The print media retain their significance in India despite the deplorably high rate of illiteracy in the country and the proliferation of new forms of mass communications facilitated by ever-new technologies. The press here is currently in the process of reinventing itself, for better or for worse, to meet the challenges before it at the turn of the millennium. The responses and concerns of women in journalism vis-à-vis some of the possible implications of this ongoing process are also discussed here.

I hope the book will be of interest and use not only to women currently practising journalism but also to their male colleagues, young persons of both sexes who are contemplating or undergoing training for a career in journalism, and those who run the press as editors, managers and/or proprietors. I hope it will also help the reading public to better understand the press and the people working in it—which, in turn, may make them more informed, aware and savvy consumers and users of the media.

Ammu Joseph

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The Story So Far

Thursday, 16 October 1997: I was preparing for one of those talks on The Media and Women that have become an occupational hazard for some of us when I came upon an unexpected bonanza. Of the six bylines on the front page of *The Indian Express*, Bangalore, that day, four were of women: Nirupama Subramaniam, Anjali Mody, Jyoti Malhotra and Angana Parekh (in order of appearance).

What is more, all the four had clearly pushed aside the lace curtain that once separated the guys from the gals in the press and were out there covering the tough terrain of violent conflict (Subramaniam on a major suicide bomb attack in central Colombo), politics (Parekh on internal wranglings in the Bharatiya Janata Party), and international relations (Malhotra on a diplomatic row between India and Britain). In addition, two of them were obviously foreign correspondents (Subramaniam in Sri Lanka and Mody in the United Kingdom—the latter, incidentally, reporting from London on novelist Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize triumph: a woman newsmaker on the front page, too!).

To add to the excitement, Subramaniam's was not just a routine account of the death and destruction that followed the bomb explosion in a busy business hub of Colombo. She was part of the lead story of the day, caught—as she put it—'in the middle of the terrorist attack in the Sri Lankan capital this morning.'

According to the report, within minutes of hearing the high-intensity explosion, she and a (male) colleague from an Indian news agency 'were racing towards the rising plume of smoke ... '

and found themselves in the midst of 'a full-scale battle', with 'fully armed troopers wearing bullet-proof jackets rushing about just 200 metres away, the sound of gunfire and a series of low-intensity explosions, the soldiers taking aim and firing, more retaliatory fire.' They both 'hit the road and lay down flat, as close to the car as possible, as the soldiers moved towards us ... Time stood still for about 30 minutes as both sides exchanged fire ... ' Eventually, they managed to communicate to the soldiers that they were journalists and were allowed to get away.

There was an additional bonus that day. Both the lead articles on the editorial page were also by women: Pamela Philipose on the girl child and Jyoti Malhotra on Queen Elizabeth's visit to India. And the customary light piece on the edit page was by Abha Sharma—yet another woman.

High Visibility

That was, admittedly, an unusual day, but not as uncommon as it would have been just a few years ago. Over the past year and some, I have been paying more attention than I normally would to the gender behind the bylines in the five daily newspapers I read (all, unfortunately, in English).

Female bylines regularly appear on the front and city pages of at least three of them. The editorial pages of all the five frequently carry articles by women, analysing a wide range of current events and issues, including subjects related to the high-prestige areas of politics, economics, international affairs and what is euphemistically known as defence. Although bylines in general are more scarce on the business pages, women have clearly entered that space, too—with one even writing a regular column on money and banking. It is, of course, no surprise that the features pages and supplements of the papers are virtually overrun with female bylines.

The growing presence of women in the Indian press has become more obvious than ever in the 1990s. You see them everywhere:

streaming in and out of newspaper and magazine offices, bustling around in newsrooms and milling about wherever news—of various sorts—is being made. Television news footage of press conferences often reveals several women among the assembled journalists. It is perhaps a sign of the times that the heroines of a number of recent feature films and television serials in various Indian languages are intrepid female journalists. In fact, in one new and popular film, a female 'human bomb' (suicide bomber) masquerades as a press person to gain access to her target.[1] Women as journalists have clearly arrived in the popular imagination.

The high visibility of women on the news and current affairs programmes of the newly burgeoning television medium has added to the general impression that the Indian media are on the brink of a female take-over. Could this be the beginning in this country of the 'feminisation of the media' already being discussed in other parts of the world?

Not quite, I'm afraid. In fact, the so-called feminisation of the media is a bit of a red herring worldwide, according to Margaret Gallagher, who has studied and written extensively on media and gender issues across the globe. 'Even if the lower ranks of media organisations accommodate a growing number of women,' she says, 'there is no evidence that the upper echelons of the media have become "feminised".'

Besides, she points out, 'Perceptions do not necessarily correspond with material facts.' Interestingly, she cites an Indian experience (from the late 1980s) to illustrate this point: 'In a study of senior management in Indian television, S.R. Joshi found a wide gap between beliefs and reality. Most of the men surveyed believed that women were well-represented at senior levels, and that the proportion of women being recruited and promoted to senior posts was steadily increasing. However, this impression was simply not borne out by the data . . . '[2]

The Horse's Mouth

There is, unfortunately, not much Indian data to go by. But before dredging up the little that exists, let me clarify that the main thrust of this book is not on facts and figures but on the human beings who present and analyse them in newspapers and magazines. More specifically, the focus here is on the women who now constitute a significant proportion of the Indian press corps.

The fact that there are many more women in journalism in India today is obvious. So is the reality that they are increasingly playing a visible and, often, valuable role in the press as both writers and editors.

However, it is not clear whether women's current participation in different sections and aspects of the press is as widespread as it seems from the evidence in English language publications located in media centres like Delhi and Mumbai (formerly Bombay). Nor is it clear what larger numbers mean in terms of women's professional status, mobility and influence within the press. Further, little is known about their experiences as females in a hitherto male-dominated field that is still widely viewed in many parts of the country as an unconventional—if not inappropriate—career for women. Also ambiguous is the question of how women in journalism see and place themselves in the context of the profession and the society to which they belong.

The few previous attempts to document the experiences and opinions of media women in India appear to have been based on the assumption that gender plays a decisive role in their professional life—in terms of their career paths and choices, as well as their professional and societal duties. The presumption that sex is destiny does not always go down well with media professionals who happen to be female. For instance, many resent or dismiss the notion that they have a special responsibility to actively promote the coverage of 'women's issues' and improve the portrayal of women in the media.

As a journalist who, like many others, has interacted closely with the Indian women's movement since the late 1970s, I am aware of the mutual unease that has often (though not always) characterized the relationship between women journalists and activists. It seems to me that much of the discomfort emanates from an imperfect or incomplete understanding of each other's areas of activity, concerns, convictions, compulsions and expectations, and an inadequate appreciation of the constraints within which both sets of women function.

I attempt in this book to create a space for women who are journalists—or journalists who are women—to speak for themselves on a wide range of issues. These relate to the profession they have chosen, the organizations and colleagues they work with, their interactions with sources of news and information, the interface between their professional and personal lives and, indeed, the question of whether or not gender has any impact on their careers, for better or for worse.

In the rest of this introductory chapter, I try to provide a context for the experiences and observations of women currently active in the press. I have pieced together the little information I have been able to glean from various sources about the number of women in Indian journalism today and the history of women's involvement in the Indian press, at least in the recent past. I have also included some information and analyses relating to media women in other parts of the world which, I think, are interesting and relevant in the Indian context.

Elusive Data

Reliable numbers are notoriously difficult to come by in India. It is small comfort that, as far as women's work participation in the media is concerned, paucity of credible statistics seems to be a more or less worldwide phenomenon.

According to Annabelle Srebemy-Mohammadi, 'There is an acute lack of empirical data even from Western industrial societies concerning the situation of women in the media. Statistical data from other regions is even thinner. Information on gender trends in employment within the media is equally patchy, data is seldom comparable, and definitions concerning categories of employment are not constant. Any figures or tables are estimations, compiled from several national and regional reports, and merely indicative, rather than substantive.'[3]

Gallagher confirms this: 'Relatively little systematic study has been made of women's employment status in media organisations around the world. The data are difficult to obtain, requiring access to internal information which many employers regard as confidential.' It was this information gap that she set out to fill— 'at least in a preliminary way,' as she puts it—through her 1995 report based on research covering 239 media organisations in 43 countries around the world.[4]

The Global Context

Where statistics are available, they have usually been gathered through major national or international efforts. For instance, in the United States of America, even the official census seems to yield such data. The 1970 US census, for example, revealed that women in journalism were not only outnumbered 2:1 by men but also confined to the lower ranks.[5]

Similarly, a 1988 study by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, covering a newsroom workforce of 55,000 professionals employed at the nation's 1,600 daily newspapers, revealed that women then represented 35 per cent of the total and 46 per cent of the youngest group of hires.[6] A 1992 survey by the National Federation of Press Women found that women have been increasing their share of management posts in the American press by only one per cent per year since 1977; if that rate continues, the report points out, it will be another 30 years before there is gender balance in top newspaper jobs in the US.[7]

In Europe more recent, official figures are available at both national and regional levels. For instance, a 1994 report of the Nordic Council of Ministers reveals that the proportion of women journalists has doubled since the 1970s in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden; by 1993, 49 per cent of all Finnish journalists, for example, were women. Similarly, Gallagher's 1984 survey of women in broadcasting, commissioned by the European Commission, has been regularly updated since.[8]

But there are differences in the availability of information across Europe, too. For instance, while researching her 1994 book, Ginny Dougary discovered that no organization in the UK was monitoring women's progress in newspapers. According to her, 'The National Union of Journalists has an equality council, but has not collated any figures relating to seniority for about ten years. Women journalists themselves are not keeping tabs on their employers: at this point, they are the only female media professionals who have not established their own networking or lobbying group.'[9]

Some statistics are available from small and/or sparsely populated countries, where the numbers are presumably more manageable. For example, Gallagher quotes 1991 figures produced by the Association des Journalistes Tunisiens, which suggest that the number of women journalists in Tunisia doubled between 1983 and 1991 to 22 per cent of the total. A 1994 national survey by the New Zealand Journalists' Training Organisation, quoted by Gallagher, puts the percentage of women journalists in that country at 45 per cent.[10]

When the total number of journalists is just a few hundred it is obviously easier to count the women among them. For instance, according to Kiranjit Kaur, women numbered 42 out of a total of 390 journalists in Cambodia, constituting 10.8 per cent of the Cambodian press corps as of June 1995.[11]

Indian Figures

Subcontinental India clearly presents a far more daunting challenge, with the multiplicity of genres and languages adding to the difficulties arising from sheer size and numbers. No major effort seems to have been made at any level so far to estimate the number of journalists in the country, let alone the percentage of women among them. In my opinion, nothing short of a massive exercise covering a sample of at least those newspapers and magazines in each major genre occupying the top two or three spots in the circulation sweepstakes in each language would provide the basis for anything close to a realistic estimate.

At present, the only countrywide statistics available for India are those presented in Gallagher's report, which covers the 1990-95 period. The Indian segment of the global survey includes the public radio and television networks (Akashvani and Doordarshan, respectively), as well as six newspapers—four in English and two in Hindi: *The Hindu, The Indian Express, Financial Express, The Times of India (English), Jansatta* and *Navbharat Times* (Hindi). Since the data fot the three newspapers that belong to the *Indian Express* group of publications (*IE, FE, JS*) and the two which belong to the *Times of India* group (*TOI, NBT*) are consolidated, they do not reveal the disparity, if any, in the number of women employed in different publications produced by the same establishment.[12]

According to the report, women's share of media employment in India is only 12 per cent, although women make up 25 per cent of the total labour force in the country. In the period 1990-95, women held only 8 per cent of the jobs in the press, while their presence in broadcasting was slightly better, at 12 per cent. And these figures relate not just to journalists but to all women employed in the organisations covered by the survey.

Within the press establishments included in the survey, taken together, women have a 15 per cent share of jobs in what is described as journalism/editorial but none in the areas classified as creative (photographers, artists, illustrators and graphic designers) and technical (jobs related to typesetting, photocomposition and printing).

The survey used four broad occupational categories to classify jobs in journalism/editorial. It found that, in the press establishments covered, women make up 9 per cent of the reporters, 30 per cent of the sub-editors, 10 per cent of the editors and 12 per cent of the editorial executives.

It is not clear what positions were included in the editor and editorial executive categories. Gallagher mentions as curious the fact that women seem to account for a relatively high proportion of sub-editors and editors, and are even represented at the level of editorial executives, despite their low overall share of jobs in the press. In India, 'sub-editor' is a common entry level position for women and many remain 'subs' for years on end. So it is not surprising that this is where the bulk of the women are found. The sub-editor position here (equivalent to that of the copy editor in some countries) cannot in any way be equated with the posts of editors and editorial executives.

According to the survey, women make up 2 per cent, 9 per cent and 13 per cent of the total staff in *The Hindu*, the three newspapers of the *Indian Express* group and the two newspapers of the *Times of India* group, respectively. The percentage of women in editorial jobs is 9.2 (*Hindu*), 17.9 (*IE*) and 20.9 (*TOI*).

India emerges surprisingly close to the bottom of the global scale in terms of women's work participation in both the media as a whole and the press in particular, going by Gallagher's report. It shares the 12 per cent mark with Malawi. Only Japan trails behind, with women there comprising just 8 per cent of all media employees. In Malaysia, the only other Asian country included in the survey, women have a 27 per cent share of jobs within the media. Mozambique and Argentina, with 16 per cent each, Peru with 18 per cent and Tanzania with 19 per cent may be only marginally ahead of India. However, the average across six Latin

American countries and ten Southern African nations is 25 per cent and 27 per cent, respectively.

The European average is about 43 per cent but there is considerable regional variation. Some of the Baltic states (Estonia and Lithuania) emerge at the top of the global scale with 50 per cent, Central and Eastern Europe come next with an average of 45 per cent, the Nordic countries average 41 per cent and Western Europe brings up the rear with 35 per cent. In both Australia and Canada women's share of media employment is 39 per cent. It is important to remember that all these averages refer to women's overall share of media employment and include employees other than journalists.

In the Indian context, it is vital to take into account differences in hiring patterns between the so-called 'national' English press and the 'regional' press in the country's multiple languages. A small sample survey done by Aditi Kapoor in 1996 provides a glimpse of the disparities in the gender composition of staff in English and language publications even within a single publishing group.[13]

According to Kapoor, at a time when the *TOI*, Delhi, had a woman chief reporter and seven women among its 16 city reporters, its Hindi counterpart, *NBT*, had only one woman reporter in a team of 12 and she was not on the regular staff. On the editorial desk, the *TOI* had a female deputy news editor and nine women sub-editors out of a total of 22. *NBT* had one woman chief sub-editor but no female sub-editors in a team comprising 12. On the other hand, *NBT's* features page had four women in a team of six. In the national news bureau of the *TOI*, five of the 17 special correspondents were women, while the *NBT* bureau had an all-male team of eight. In the *TOI*, two out of a total of eight journalists covering the business beat were women, and there were two women among the six reporters covering sports. On the business desk, women outnumbered men by two.

In the *Indian Express*, five of the 11 city reporters were women, while more than half of the 14 special correspondents in the national news bureau were women. At that time, *IE* also had a woman as resident editor and another as development editor. On the news desk, there were 11 sub-editors out of a total of 25, although their bosses were all men. Meanwhile, *Jansatta*, the Hindi daily of the *Express* group, had only one woman reporter (still on probation), no female special correspondents and only one woman sub-editor.

In the same period, the *Hindustan Times* had five women reporters in a team of 10; two female special correspondents in a team of 14; and one woman designated development editor. Its Hindi daily, *Dainik Hindustan*, had two women out of a total of eight reporters, no female special correspondents and no women on the news desk.

In my efforts to at least update Gallagher's figures on women journalists in selected Indian newspapers, I have been only partially successful: the *Hindu* and the *Times of India* newspaper groups have made available information on journalists employed in their various publications in 1998.

With 120 women among the 693 employees classified as journalists in the *Hindu* group all over the country, women now make up 17 per cent of the total (incidentally, all their publications are in English).

Within the group's daily newspaper, *The Hindu*, there has been marginal improvement over the 1993 position reported by Gallagher, with women now constituting 11 per cent of the total of 446 journalists in the daily (up from 9.2 per cent).[14]

Business Line, the group's new financial daily, has obviously helped improve its overall female work participation rate, with 36 per cent of its 164-strong editorial staff comprising women. In *Frontline*, the current affairs fortnightly of the group, women make up 31 per cent of the total editorial staff strength of twenty-nine.

The group's sizeable sports department boasts only one woman; she singly accounts for 1.8 per cent of its total staff of 54! The *Hindu* has two women in the second and third positions at the top of the editorial hierarchy: Malini Parthasarathy is the executive editor and Nirmala Lakshman the joint editor. Like the editor, they are career journalists who belong to the proprietorial family. *Business Line* has one woman (Rasheeda Bhagat) among the three deputy editors placed just below the executive editor in the editorial hierarchy.

The *Times of India* group's statistics are complicated by the fact that the company has separate lists of staff who come under the old system of employment regulated by government-appointed wage boards and those who are, presumably, employed under the new 'contract' system (of which more later). The only all-India data supplied relate to the latter.[15]

According to the information provided by the company, the group has 605 employees classified as journalists within this category of staff, spread over four newspapers (*The Times of India, The Economic Times, Navbharat Times* and *Maharashtra Times*) and two magazines (*Femina* and *Filmfare*). Of these, 180, or 29 per cent, are women. It is difficult to tell whether this marks a significant increase over the 1994 figure of 13 per cent reported by Gallagher because that took into account only two dailies and it is unclear whether the data used then included those employed under both the wage board and the contract systems. Also, that survey related to all women employed by the organization, not only journalists.

In any case, in the *Times of India* newspaper, out of a total of 298 journalists, eighty-six, or 28 per cent, are women. Women make up 29 per cent of the staff of the group's financial daily, *The Economic Times* (77 out of 259). While *Filmfare* (the group's film fortnightly) has a 50 per cent representation of women on its editorial staff, *Femina* (its fortnightly for women) has a predictably high female staff strength: 86 per cent (just two of its total of fifteen are male).

Although both the *Maharashtra Times* (the group's Marathi daily) and the *Navbharat Times* (its Hindi daily) do have women journalists on their staff, they do not seem to figure in this category of employees. However, according to the information provided by the company about staff coming under the wage board system in Mumbai, there are three women in *MT*(making up nine per cent of its editorial staff in this category), and six women on the staff of *NBT* (comprising about 18 per cent of the total in this category). Whether or not their exclusion from the contract category is significant, it is clear that there is considerable difference in the percentage of women in the English and Indian language publications of the same newspaper group.

Of the four resident editors overseeing the *Times of India* editions in different cities, one is a woman: Dina Vakil in Mumbai. The paper's only financial editor was female: Sucheta Dalal (she has since left). Of the two persons designated senior editor in the paper, one is a woman: Bachi Karkaria. The only other women in the list of senior journalists supplied by the company are the editor of *Femina* (Sathya Saran) and the Bangalore-based editor of the Internet/online edition of *The Economic Times* (Saritha Rai).

Whatever else these unsatisfactory statistics signify, they do indicate that women's share of jobs in the Indian print media has been slowly but steadily increasing over the years. They also reveal that women are even moving into executive positions within the press here. This is in keeping with the trend almost everywhere in the world over the past two decades. However, it is clear that India has some catching up to do, especially in certain areas—both geographical and professional.

So there is no doubt that more and more women are entering the press all over the country, including in places and establishments where their presence was hitherto negligible or even non-existent. But the high visibility of women journalists in newspapers and magazines published in media centres like Delhi and Mumbai is not necessarily matched elsewhere. Similarly, the apparent overflow of women in the English press is not paralleled in the Indian language press. Also, the high-profile careers of a few famous and successful women do not necessarily reflect the reality across the board.

The Pioneers

There is little documentation of the history of women's involvement in the Indian press. However, it is apparent that, as in other parts of the world, a number of women across the country have been involved in journalism, of one kind or another and in various languages, since the turn of the century. Many of the pioneers brought out journals for women, some launched in the last century.

The first known woman journalist in Hindi, for example, was Hemant Kumari Debi, who began publishing *Sugribini* from Allahabad in 1888, according to Pramila Sharma. The very next year, *Bharati Bhagini*, another journal for women in Hindi, came out from the same city, this time published by Hari Devi.[16]

Sharma mentions several other names of women in Hindi journalism in the first half of the twentieth century, including several editors of journals of different kinds for women: Asha Devi, Bhagwan Devi-Paliwal, Dhanrani Kunwar, Gayatri Devi Varma, Kala Devi 'Bachchi,' Kamla Tai Lele, Krishna Behen Nag, Kulsoom Syani, Kumari Hardevi Malkani, Kuntal Kumari, Mahadevi Varma, Radha Devi Goyanka, Rameshwari Nehru, Shivrani Devi, Shachirani Gurtu, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, Yashoda Devi Vaidya and Yashowati Tiwari.

According to Sharma, some of these women were related to progressive men, many of them involved in movements for religious and social reform and/or national independence. Their journals for women often reflected this outlook, featuring articles on women's education and emancipation, contemporary politics, health and literature. On the other hand, a number of these early publications edited by women focussed more exclusively on the perennial staples of traditional women's magazines, such as sewing, cooking and housekeeping. Sharma points out that a few of the women who worked on more serious journals along with their husbands typically did not receive the recognition they deserved.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the progressive social and political movements that emerged in many parts of India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created an environment in which at least some women—usually from privileged backgrounds—could venture into new fields of activity, such as the press, albeit within relatively defined and protected spaces. This trend continued and intensified with the dawn of Independence in 1947.

There are scattered references to women in the English language press in India in the period around or just after Independence. From these, it appears that women came into the commercial English press (as opposed to small journals published by individuals or small collectives) in fits and starts, finding some cities, certain areas of journalism, some publishing houses and certain editors more open to them than others. The little accessible literature on the pioneers exists mainly in the form of casual reminiscences and feature articles which are woefully short on dates and other details and refer almost exclusively to Mumbai and Delhi.[17]

From the available information, and not surprisingly, it appears that the press in cosmopolitan Mumbai was the first to open its doors to women. Homai Vyaravalla was probably the first woman on the staff of a mainstream publication when she joined *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (now defunct) in the 1930s. She was also the first female news photographer in the country—a rare species even today. Unusually, there is some recorded material on the first lady of Indian photography, partly because of the recent, renewed interest in her work, resulting in and from several exhibitions of her photographs over the past couple of years.

She was apparently able to do a wide variety of work even in those early days. When World War II broke out, for example, she was assigned to shoot pictures of the wounded in Mumbai's hospitals. Her photographs of India's preparedness for defence were apparently highly acclaimed. In 1942 she and her photographer husband joined the Far Eastern Bureau of the British Information Services and moved to Delhi, where she had the opportunity to capture on camera memorable moments and famous personages of recent Indian history, including the freedom struggle, the nationalist leaders and the transfer of power. Her photographs were used by a wide range of publications and agencies, both Indian and foreign.

In recent interviews she has spoken of 'bicycling furiously from Safdarjung to Daryaganj and Connaught Place to Nehru Place, catching deadlines to match headlines.' Although she was a lone woman within the exclusive fraternity of news photographers, she says she never faced problems: 'I was known for being stern. I would go to assignments on my bicycle, wearing a sari and carrying a donkey's load on my shoulder, at times returning as late as one in the morning. But those were safer days.'

Only early in her career, when she was working closely with her future husband (who introduced her to the art of photography), did she find that they were perceived differently: despite their joint venture, he got all the credit lines! For him, she says, photography was more a hobby than a profession and in Delhi he opted to take care of processing while she went around shooting pictures. 'We never cared about what other people thought,' she says. 'When you are doing something right these things should not matter ... I never felt I was doing something different as a woman. I was the only girl in my matriculation batch. Though I was not a tomboy, it never struck me that I was doing something unusual.'

According to her, she kept her identity as a woman throughout her career: 'Things were very orthodox in my days, yet there were women dressing up in slacks. But I always felt that for a woman to prove herself in a man's world, she does not need to be dressed like one. I always wore a sari or a Punjabi dress in the daytime and a sari for evening assignments.'

After Independence she began working with the Indian government and remained active up to the 1970s. She says she quit the profession in 1971 mainly because of the new security consciousness among political personalities, which restricts photographers' freedom, and the decline of 'the old school of highly educated gentlemen news photographers.' At eighty-six, she now lives a quiet but independent life in Vadodara (Baroda), driving her own car and venturing out of town occasionally to be present at exhibitions of her photographs in other cities.

There is less recorded information about the first few writers to enter the field. Many of them seem to have taken the film journalism route into the profession: Clare Mendonca (*The Times of India*), Manorama Katju (*Sunday Standard*) and Abad Karanjia (*Onlooker*) were among the earliest, while Gulshan Ewing and Deviyani Chaubal came in a little later.

Ewing, who pioneered a gossip column, 'Sunday ki Sunday,' in *Current*, later became editor of *Eve's Weekly* as well as *Star & Style*, in which Chaubal—popularly known as India's Hedda Hopper—wrote her gossip column, 'Frankly Speaking.' Elegant, soft-spoken 'Mrs. Ewing' was my editor at *Eve's Weekly*, which I joined first as a trainee, later as a reporter/sub-editor and finally, from 1977 to '81, as assistant editor. One of my duties as AE was to prise columns out of 'Devi' (a colourful character, always dramatically dressed in white, embroidered organdy saris), usually well past her deadline! Among the other old-timers in *Eve's Weekly* during Ewing's long reign were Chakresh Jain, Perin Nicholson and Vera Rikhye.

Before joining *Eve's Weekly* in the mid-1960s, Ewing worked with *Filmfare* and also as assistant editor of *Femina* under its second editor, a man. She retired towards the end of the 1980s and now lives in England.

Several other women who came into journalism in the early days were also associated with publications for women. According to Jaya Ramanathan, Ratan Karaka introduced a women's page in *Current*, a newspaper owned by her brother. Frene Talyarkhan was the first woman to edit two magazines—*Trend* and *Flair*—at a time when even women's magazines were still overseen by men. In 1959, after selling *Flair* to *The Times* of *India* group, she became the first, albeit short-lived, editor of *Femina*, its new women's magazine.

Among her editorial staff at *Femina* were Ina Sen, who functioned as assistant editor, Vimla Patil, Anita Sarkar and Nina Merchant. According to Patil, Talyarkhan was asked to leave barely a year after the magazine was launched because neither her style of editing nor her personality suited the management.[18] With her departure came a major turnover in the staff. Patil worked for a while with the new male editor but soon left to join the United States Information Service as a feature editor.

In 1966 she returned to *Femina* as its assistant editor, replacing Ewing, who had moved over to its older competitor, *Eve's Weekly*. Among the women on the staff of the magazine in that period were Meenakshi Raja and Farida Khan. Patil became editor of *Femina* in 1973—its third editor and second female one—and stayed at the post for twenty years.

According to Ramanathan, Hilla Vakil and Geeta Sinha (the latter based in Calcutta) were among the early freelancers, while Nuru Chagla is another name that crops up in the list of pioneers.

Meanwhile, in Delhi, Kamla Mankekar was among the handful of women to join a mainstream newspaper in the early days. After a few months in the *Indian News Chronicle*, she joined *The Times of India* in 1950. According to her, by then *The Statesman* had two women on the staff in the capital: Raj Chawla, who was on the desk, and Amita Malik, who 'reigned supreme among the film critics of the capital' and began the first radio column in the country, known as 'Listening Post'. Promilla Kalhan, another contemporary, wrote for *The Hindustan Times*, while Ela Sen was almost definitely the first Indian woman to become a foreign correspondent, representing *HT* in the United Kingdom at the time of Independence.

Aruna Mukherji and Amrita Rangaswamy, both of *The Indian Express*, were among the first women to become assistant editors of a major newspaper—the former in Mumbai and the latter in Chennai (formerly Madras). Mukherji, a graduate of the London School of Economics, was also possibly the first Indian woman to work in a news agency; her first five years in the profession were with the Press Trust of India in Mumbai, where she rewrote Indian news for Reuters. Around the same time, says Mankekar, Anjali Sinha wrote for *The Hindu* and Shantha Rungachary—earlier the first woman trainee in *The Indian Express*—for *The Statesman*. Vidya Nehru (later Dutt), who joined the *National Herald* in Lucknow during the same period, was the first woman to work on the night shift, according to Mankekar.

Among the other names from the English press during this era, gleaned from various sources, are 'Blue' Ranganathan, M. Ratnakumari and Anjali Sirkar *née* Sengupta (Chennai); Shakuntala Srivastava Masani, Mrs. B.K. Karanjia and Uma Anand—the original 'Aunty Wendy' of *The Illustrated Weekly* (Mumbai), Mrs. Kopper (Bangalore), and Coleen Gantzer (a Kochi-based freelance travel writer, who is still active and prolific, sharing her byline with her husband and colleague, Hugh).

During the same period, or even earlier, there were, apparently, a few women in the Indian language press—other than those associated with the Hindi journals mentioned above—although there is even less documentation about them. For example, in 1944, as a teenaged bride transported from rural Gujarat to metropolitan Calcutta, Jaloo Kanga was catapulted into the world of journalism by her father-in-law, who had founded the Parsi-

Gujarati publication, *Navroz*, as his contribution to the nationalist enterprise. She went on to become the paper's mainstay. Says her daughter, Bachi Karkaria, 'She was only *Navroz's* joint editor, my father chauvinistically keeping the top notch for himself, but "Jaloo-ben" was the unquestioned boss.'[19]

In the Marathi press, publisher-editor Leela Parulekar was active in the Pune-based *Sakal*. When Lata Raje joined *Loksatta* in the 1960s, she heard that a certain Mrs. Gadgil used to look after the paper's children's page in the 1950s. And a journalist in Hyderabad says K. Ramalakshmi, a sub-editor with the Telugu *Swatantra*, was the first woman in Telugu journalism.

If the women who entered the mainstream press in the 1940s and '50s can be viewed as a first, small wave of female journalists in the modern era, the next and bigger wave occurred in the 1960s and early '70s. Among those who swept into journalism on the second wave were, in the English press: Usha Rai, Prabha Dutt (*née* Behl), Razia Ismail, Jyotsana Kapoor, Neena Vyas, Modhumita Mojumdar, Zinat Imam, Rami Chhabra, Rashmi Saxena, Madhu Jain, Coomi Kapoor and Tavleen Singh (in Delhi), Olga Tellis, Zarine Merchant, Fatma Zakaria, Elizabeth Rao, Bachi Karkaria, Dina Vakil and Carol Andrade (in Mumbai), Anjali Sirkar (in Chennai), Gita Aravamudan and Rima Kashyap (in Bangalore), and Kalyani Shankar in Hyderabad.

These were the days before contemporary notions of women's liberation had taken root in India. Nevertheless, several of these obviously independent-minded women fought hard to escape from the professional ghettos into which stray women in the media were then customarily herded. A number of them managed to get into the coveted reporting stream, slowly making their way from flower shows to fires and, eventually, even battle fronts of various kinds. They also forced newspaper establishments to contend with issues like maternity leave—both Rai and Dutt were reportedly told by their respective managements that the rule books had to be amended for the purpose. Many are still active in the profession, with some now occupying important positions in their respective publications; they talk about their uphill climb elsewhere in the book.

By the 1960s, some journalism courses were available in various universities around the country and educated women who did not fancy traditional avenues of employment were obviously attracted to them. Several women of the second wave, for example, graduated from such courses. Prabha Dutt, Jyotsana Kapoor and Razia Ismail were students of the post-graduate diploma course in journalism then offered by Punjab University in Chandigarh. Bachi Karkaria did a similar course in Calcutta University before joining the training scheme of *The Times of India* in Mumbai. Some, like Coomi Kapoor and Dina Vakil, even went overseas for journalism studies.

In the 1960s, more women began trickling into the Indian language press, too. For example, in Maharashtra, Indutai Tilak was apparently not only the first woman but one of the first persons to take advantage of the first journalism course in Pune, which began in 1962. A daughter-in-law of Bal Gangadhar Tilak—a well-known leader of the freedom movement and founder-editor of the journal, *Kesri*—she became known as the first woman in Marathi journalism. Also in Pune, Vidya Bal joined *Stree*, a progressive magazine for women, as a sub-editor in 1964; she became its editor in 1983 but left in 1986 when its new proprietors wanted to turn it into a more conventional women's magazine. She now publishes an annual magazine for women as part of a collective enterprise to link the lives of rural and urban women.

Lata Raje joined *Loksatta* in Mumbai in 1966 and is still an assistant editor with the paper. And, in 1969, Neelam Upadhye managed to get into the *Maharashtra Times* in Mumbai through the *Times of India's* training scheme, despite the strong objection of its longtime editor, who had successfully blocked her direct entry a year earlier; she still works with the paper as a roving correspondent.

It is significant that women were able to break into the mainstream press in India at the same time and often earlier than women in countries widely assumed to be more 'advanced' in such matters. It is true that, like many of their counterparts elsewhere in the world, some of the pioneers were related to male publishers and/or editors and their involvement in the press was socially acceptable because it was 'all in the family.' Also, as mentioned earlier, many women of the early period were connected—on their own or through their families—to religious or social reform movements and/or the freedom struggle, which were noted for their relatively progressive ideas about women's role in society.

But equally, as Kalpana Sharma points out, cultural factors may have played an influential role in ensuring the early acceptance of women in positions of authority in India. There is little doubt that a particular type or class of Indian woman has generally found it easier to enter many fields of activity—including high prestige professions like medicine, engineering, law, the civil services and the media—than her counterpart in many Western countries.

According to Sharma, this may have something to do with the prominent position occupied by female goddesses in Hinduism, the dominant religion of the country. Women have also played important roles in Indian mythology. Similarly, Indian history records a number of female heroines, including warriors and revolutionaries. 'They may be few and scattered,' says Sharma, 'but these examples are there.' According to her, in the iconography within which women are located in Western culture, they are more narrowly reduced to sex object, mother or little woman.

There may be something to this argument. While it is true that Greek mythology, for instance, similarly features strong female goddesses and characters, they are not part of the modern cultural landscape of the West in the way goddesses and mythological figures continue to be integral to Indian culture even today. Similarly, although many strong female personalities do appear in the Bible, the dominant image projected by establishment Christianity is of the woman as mother.

Be that as it may, if culture is an important factor, so are class, caste and religious or ethnic community. It is clear that the women who were able to take advantage of the cultural context referred to above usually belonged to relatively privileged sections of society, where women also had greater access to education, including university-level education. Most women who entered prestigious professions, like the media, in the early days came from reasonably affluent and liberal socio-economic backgrounds.

Another factor contributing to the presence of women, particularly in the Indian language press and especially as editors of magazines, is the close connection between the worlds of vernacular literature and journalism. Many women came into journalism after having made a mark as creative writers in their respective languages. Interestingly, this trend persists to this day in many sections of what is known as 'the language press.'

The Third Wave

The first major flood of women poured into the press from the mid-1970s onwards. A number of factors may have contributed to creating this sizeable third wave. The ripple effects of the growing international women's movement, officially heralded worldwide by the United Nations' International Year for Women (1975), were stirring the waters in India, too, at this time.

This was also the period following the bitter experience of the Internal Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi (1975-77), which included press censorship and served to alert citizens to the importance of safeguarding civil liberties and democratic rights, including the freedom of expression. Newly liberated by the fall of this short-lived quasi-dictatorship, the press became far more vigorous and vigilant than it had been since Independence. A magazine boom followed in the early 1980s, which vastly improved and expanded the job market for journalists.

In any case, a large number of women joined the press during this period. They are too numerous to list here but many of them are among the widely recognised names in the field today and discuss their experiences and views elsewhere in this book.

It was perhaps inevitable—in view of the prevailing atmosphere—that many of these women and some from the older generation were not only aware of, but wanted to contribute to, the social and political transformation then in the making across the nation. Quite a few women entering the field at this time were associated with, or at least sympathetic to, the women's movement, the human rights and civil liberties movement, various grassroots movements for social and economic justice in different parts of the country and/or, a little later, the nascent environmental movement. Many of them brought this consciousness to their work.

For example, several women in the profession went out of their way to provide prominent and effective coverage to the anti-dowry demonstrations in the capital in the late 1970s, when the practice of burning brides who could not fulfil demands for perpetual dowry first came to public notice. Similarly, during the nationwide anti-rape campaign in 1980-81, launched in the wake of the Supreme Court's controversial judgement in the infamous Mathura rape case, a number of women in the Mumbai press corps actively tried to highlight the many myths and misconceptions about rape and the loopholes in the laws relating to the crime. Several of these issues were also regularly highlighted and analysed by Rami Chhabra in what was possibly the first feminist column on the editorial page of a mainstream English newspaper, *The Indian Express*.

Likewise, journalists who kept their ears to the ground by interacting with activists involved in issues of justice played a major role in raising public awareness about bonded labour, caste-linked atrocities, the fallout of ill-conceived development projects, and the problems of farmers, landless labourers, undertrial prisoners, inmates of 'correctional' institutions, patients in mental health hospitals, commercial sex workers and a host of other marginalised sections of society. A significant number of these journalists were women.

The new vigour and vitality of the press at this time seem to have also encouraged women hitherto associated with the alternative press to move into the mainstream. For instance, the closure of *Himmat*—a small, independent journal which had put up a spirited fight against censorship during the Emergency, when the rest of the press had more or less succumbed to pressure—brought its editor, Kalpana Sharma, and other members of its staff, such as Neerja Chowdhury, Shahnaz Anklesaria and Rupa Chinai, into major newspapers in Mumbai and Delhi.

At the same time, many mainstream journalists were enthusiastic readers of, if not contributors to, new alternative publications like *Manushi* (a feminist journal in English and Hindi), which were beginning to make an impact on debates relating to a wide range of issues, including but not only those labelled women's issues.

It was not unusual for journalists in those days to openly identify with initiatives to remedy some of the ills of society. I remember, for instance, that Jyoti Punwani, Gouri Salvi and I used our lunch break and our own meagre funds to book Cama Hall in Mumbai for the first public meeting organised by what was then known as the Forum against Rape, a women's group which came into being in the aftermath of the Mathura rape case. Also in Mumbai, several journalists, including Punwani, Salvi, Suchita Mazumdar (now Vemuri) and others, were involved in bringing out *Raksha*, a publication of the Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights.

Some media women even took independent steps to try and ensure that justice was done to disadvantaged people they came across in the course of their work. For example, Olga Tellis filed a case in the Supreme Court relating to the rights of Mumbai's pavement dwellers. She also took a month's leave from work to participate in a major movement launched by farmers and thereby better understand their problems. Freelance journalist Sheila Barse filed petitions in the Supreme Court on behalf of women prisoners in Mumbai's central jail as well as to establish her right to information about conditions in such public institutions. Her efforts on behalf of women incarcerated in a so-called protective home in Agra prompted a well-known lawyer to file a case in the apex court in this regard. Likewise, Neerja Chowdhury filed a petition in the Supreme Court to pressurise a state government into fulfilling its promises about rehabilitating bonded labourers who had been freed amidst much publicity.

So the late 1970s and early '80s represented a period of considerable socio-political ferment and cross-fertilisation, the effects of which were reflected to a considerable extent in the press. There is no doubt that women in the profession contributed significantly to this process. For example, four out of six of the *India Today*-PUCL awards for human rights reporting in the 1980s went to women journalists. Women journalists from Mumbai formed teams to investigate the communal and caste violence in Ahmedabad in 1985, as well as the infamous case of so-called 'sati' in Deorala, Rajasthan, in 1987.

Journalists—both men and women—were also often involved in efforts to investigate and even help rehabilitate victims of a wide range of atrocities in different parts of the country—the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in the wake of the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, for example.

In our study of the coverage of women's issues in the press in the ten-year period from 1978 to '87, Kalpana Sharma and I found that the presence of women in strategic positions within the press at that time often made a substantial difference to the coverage of such issues.[20]

Of course, not all journalists and not all women in the profession in this period were so intimately involved with issues and/or movements of this nature. Many chose to keep their distance from 'causes' in their effort to uphold the hoary, if questionable, tradition of journalistic objectivity. While some may have had a personal interest in such issues, they chose to tread a different professional path. However, quite a few managed to work at both levels.

In any case, this period saw many women breaking into the high-prestige area of hard news reporting (their perceptions of the traditional demarcation in the press between hard and soft news are discussed elsewhere in the book). For example, journalists like Seema Guha, Seema Mustafa, Anita Pratap, Radhika Ramaseshan, Ritu Sarin, Shiraz Sidhwa, Tavleen Singh and others are among those widely recognised for their reportage from the hot spots in and around the country during this time: Kashmir, Punjab, the Northeastern states and Sri Lanka. Many of them broke exclusive stories and/or got exclusive interviews with leaders of the militant organisations central to the conflicts in each place.

Some of these women ventured even further afield. For instance, Mustafa arranged to be smuggled into Beirut in the early 1980s and stayed there for three weeks, the only Indian journalist covering the conflict from within the besieged city. More recently, Pratap covered the take-over of Afghanistan by the Taliban for Cable News Network (CNN).

Many of these and other women have made names for themselves in the field of political reporting or analysis or both. It would be perilous to attempt a comprehensive listing but among the bylines that have become familiar over the years, at least in 'national,' English language dailies (besides the names mentioned above) are: Neerja Chowdhury, Smita Gupta, Coomi Kapoor, Kalyani Shankar, Vidya Subramaniam, Neena Vyas, etc., in Delhi; Amrita Abraham, Olga Tellis, etc., in Mumbai; Shikha Mukherjee in Calcutta; Rasheeda Bhagat and Malini Parthasarathy in Chennai.

Women in the profession during this period often found that they were the lone females covering political events and fora well into the 1980s. In Mumbai, for example, Tellis was the first woman reporter in the city when, in 1964, she became the first woman to be hired by the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* group anywhere, and she remained the only woman covering politics and economics there for several years. In the mid-1970s, when Kalyani Shankar began working in Hyderabad, she was the only female journalist in the city. Even in the early 1980s, Manini Chatterjee found that she was initially the only woman in the press gallery of parliament.

As the only woman covering the congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Thiruvananthapuram in 1989, Chatterjee even received requests for interviews from local journalists! This is not surprising. According to a 1985 paper by Gita Aravamudan, then based in Thiruvananthapuram, during that decade there were only a handful of women working in the 223 publications reaching out to over 13.5 lakh readers in the highly literate state of Kerala. Most of them were sub-editors or staff of women's magazines. Apparently, several prestigious newspapers in the state, including the *Malayala Manorama, Kerala Kaumudi* and *The Hindu*, did not employ women at that time.[21]

The arts and culture constitute another aspect of press coverage to which women have made consistent and significant contributions from the early days to the present, as both writers and editors. In view of the numbers involved, it would be virtually impossible to mention all those who have distinguished themselves on this beat.

The Nineties

The fourth wave of women to buffet the press—in the 1990s—has assumed the proportions of a tidal wave, at least in those parts of the country where the first three had prepared the ground. Even in many other places, the slow trickle perceptible over the past few years has now established itself as a steady stream. It is only in a few places, like Kerala, that women have had to wait until the 1990s to even get through the dykes.

The fresh recruits are entering a vastly altered playing field. There is now widespread acceptance in most parts of the country of women's active participation in the world of work. Even diehard opponents of women's entry into fields like the media have had to accept that it is not possible to turn the tide. If any resistance or even hostility persists they have perforce to find expression in indirect ways.

Also, a variety of female role models are now available at senior levels in the profession and in virtually all areas and genres of journalism. Even the major dailies boast at least one executive editor, a joint editor, a few resident editors, several senior editors and deputy editors, a handful of political editors and financial/business editors, many assistant editors, several chief reporters and chiefs of bureaux, a large number of senior and special correspondents, a few news editors and deputy news editors, as well as a number of chief sub-editors who are women.

There are also several female foreign correspondents, a few women photographers, a couple of women cartoonists—Maya Kamath and Manjula Padmanabhan—and even a clutch of women covering the hitherto all-male territory of sports. A number of women are regular columnists, commenting on a variety of subjects, ranging from politics and business to the arts and the media, in both newspapers and magazines. An even larger number of women are professional, full-time freelance journalists, contributing reports, features and analytical pieces to various publications. And, apart from the several women who are editors of women's, film and society magazines, at least two women—Anjali Mathur and Amrita Shah—have been editors of magazines for men!

In addition, quite a few women in journalism have written books, once again on a wide array of topics and in a number of genres (including fiction). Among those who have authored or co-authored books in English are Shailaja Bajpai, Rajni Bakshi, Kumkum Chadha, Sucheta Dalal, Yashodhara Dalmia, Shobhaa Dé, Shanta Gokhale, Anees Jung, Promilla Kalhan, Bachi Karkaria, Sujata Madhok, Amita Malik, Seema Mustafa, Shakuntala Narasimhan, Sevanti Ninan, Mrinal Pande, Vimla Patil, Gowri Ramnarayan, Gouri Salvi, Ritu Sarin, Amrita Shah, Kalpana Sharma, Tavleen Singh, Shanta Serbjeet Singh, Gayatri Sinha, Chitra Subramaniam, Namita Unnikrishnan, Pinky Virani and myself.

It is likely that many more women in the Indian language press have written books, especially because several of them straddle the worlds of literature and journalism; at least four of those featured in this book—Mrinal Pande, Indrani Raimedhi, Kshama Sharma and Vaasanthi—write fiction in their respective languages.

At the same time, the press itself has undergone major changes in the new era of economic liberalisation and globalisation, satellite television and unbridled consumerism. The corporatisation of the press in recent years has yielded financial benefits to most journalists, with the profession now offering more attractive salaries and perks than could have been even dreamt of in earlier times. However, not only is this not a universal phenomenon, but the system of employment by contract (as opposed to 'permanent' or 'tenured' employment), which is now prevalent in many press establishments, has introduced an element of job insecurity.

Despite the financial hard times reportedly faced by many newspaper companies in the late 1990s, the media have continued to expand and proliferate, offering journalists even more job options than at the height of the magazine boom of the '80s. Job-hopping is almost as common in journalism now as it has been in advertising and other related professions for a long time. In fact, many journalists today seem to hop right out of the field into even more lucrative professions.

Technological advances may have increased the workload now borne by journalists in some respects but computers have also given them more control over production. Today technical prowess is an essential qualification for journalists; it sometimes appears to be even more valued than newsgathering, writing and editing skills, let alone knowledge, understanding and ideas.

The overarching political and economic climate of the late 1980s and the '90s has had a major impact on the press and therefore on the practice of journalism in India. There is far more stress today on the entertainment aspect of the media. Strong, unconventional views on a number of issues—recent economic trends, political hot potatoes like secularism/communalism and caste-based reservations, development priorities, etc.—seem to have become less and less acceptable within mainstream media.

In addition, journalists today seem to have less say than before in the editorial content and policies of their publications. In the new environment, within which newspapers and magazines are increasingly being seen as brands to be marketed like other consumer products, commercial interests sometimes override professional judgements. Editors and corporate managers now interact far more closely than was the custom in the past, often planning and executing joint strategies. The role and requirements of an editor have undergone significant changes in recent times.

It is this brave new world that the ever-larger numbers of women aspiring to be journalists are entering. It is also in this radically altered setting that a number of the older hands are nearing the top of the editorial ladder and a handful have achieved what would have been unthinkable just a couple of decades ago.

Time For Introspection

There is no doubt now—if ever there was—that women are in this profession to stay and, what is more, to make their mark. This seems an opportune moment for self-examination:

What have the developments of the past few decades meant for women in journalism? What have their experiences been? Have they faced any particular problems or reaped any benefits on account of their gender? Have all or some of these changed with the passage of time and the growing presence of women in the media? Have the changes been for better or for worse? What factors have influenced their experiences in the field? How do they think they are perceived by significant others within and outside the profession? What, indeed, is their self-perception? And how do they view the press, of which they are today an integral part?

These are some of the questions I hope to address in this book. Meanwhile, a few recent international studies have provided glimpses of the situation, experiences and perceptions of women working as journalists in different parts of the world. The similarity between the issues identified by women here and elsewhere is striking enough, I think, to warrant a summary here of some global data and debates.

Problems of Generalization

In any discussion on the media and women, it is useful to remember that the terms are, in themselves, loaded. As Sreberny-Mohammadi points out, '"Women" always signifies both too little and too much, claiming one specific kind of "difference" that is itself crossed by class, race, ethnicity, national culture and many other variables.

'There is a tension between an "essentialising" notion which claims women's similarity across socio-economic, political and cultural boundaries, and a notion of the construction of gender which suggests a different "product" precisely dependent upon those broader contexts (Liesbet van Zoonen, Feminist Media Studies, Sage, 1994). It is vital to remember that "the shaping of gender identity and the ways women experience subordination are connected and mediated by other core variables such as race, class, age and generation, sexual orientation, history, culture, and colonialism" (Pilar Riano, ed, Women in Grassroots Communication, Sage, 1994).'[22]

Similarly, she says, 'media' is also a complex term. They 'have been established in different parts of the world at different times, in different order, and are used within differing social and cultural milieux ... Different political contexts and cultural milieux, the structures of media ownership and control, including tendencies toward concentration and globalisation, differing legal and regulatory environments, availability of foreign cultural products, all affect the nature of media provision.

'For women, particularly, the impact and patterns of use around various media differ depending on the pre-existing cultural patterns, especially women's access to public space and participation in the public sphere. Thus in our broad discussions about the media, we gloss many crucial contextual differences which really require detailed investigation.'

Nevertheless, it is clear from a number of recent international surveys that there are certain commonalities (as well as some differences) in the ways in which women in journalism experience and perceive the profession, across the various barriers and boundaries that separate them as well as the range of media in which they work.

Obstacle Race

'In most parts of the world women's access to media employment, and to decision-making positions in the media, is now rarely hampered by outright or flagrant discrimination, in the sense of inegalitarian rules and regulations,' says Gallagher. However, she points out, 'Just as potent ... are the "invisible barriers"—the attitudes, biases, presumptions and even organisational procedures—which put women at a disadvantage in a working environment designed to accommodate male needs and priorities.'[23]

A 1996 report by the International Women's Media Foundation, Washington D.C., makes a similar point. Many journalists who responded to the IWMF survey of media women in forty countries added a subtle, sometimes invisible barrier to the eight obstacles included as options in the questionnaire. The report describes this additional hurdle as 'negative attitudes.'[24]

'Although often difficult to measure,' the report points out, 'the repercussions of these elusive obstacles are easy to recognise and frequently contribute to an unsupportive environment for women professionals.' So many survey respondents referred to stereotyping and other negative social attitudes that these have to be counted among the fundamental impediments to women's success as media professionals, the report says.

Gallagher corroborates this view: 'By far the most commonly reported obstacle to career development which women report is the problem of male attitudes.' According to her, these attitudes can have far-reaching effects on women's recruitment and promotion as well as on their experiences within the profession. 'One of the most important implications of the male dominance within media organisations is that women are judged by male standards and professional criteria,' she says. Often this means women in the profession have to constantly strive to prove that they are as good as men.

Women the world over say that one of the most exasperating aspects of the prevailing 'negative attitudes' is the fact that they are not taken seriously. Gallagher suggests that such belittlement often increases the risk of sexual harassment. Women in a wide variety of countries affirm that the 'flirtatious' remarks and behaviour of male colleagues are not just irritating or intimidating. They often make women minimise social contact with men in the profession. And this, in turn, reduces their opportunities for networking—which remains the main key to career advancement.

Stereotypical Attitudes

Stereotyped beliefs and attitudes about the qualities required for certain jobs and about how work should be handled often hinder women's progress in the media, says Gallagher. She suggests that the occasional promotion of a woman into senior management can sometimes function as a kind of alibi, allowing male-dominated management structures to continue unperturbed by any distinctly female influence. According to her, 'This "one at a time" mentality *vis-à-vis* women in senior media management precludes any possibility of women building up the kind of power base necessary for real change—either in terms of media output or in terms of the way in which media institutions are organised and managed.'

Further, she says, perceptions of media management as a tough and virile domain, where decisions are taken by men in smoke-filled rooms, are enough to stop many women from trying to become part of a world they regard as alien. According to Angela Coyle, the move out of the 'feminine role' and into 'male management' can leave women in a barren zone where they can be neither men nor women because the qualities valued in men are not acceptable in women, while the qualities women value are not deemed acceptable in shaping management style.[25]

One of the most common ways in which stereotypical attitudes continue to impinge on women media professionals in most parts of the world is in the assignment of work. In a 1992 survey covering ten countries, Kate Holman found that over half the responding journalists—both male and female—agreed that women are directed towards 'soft' topics (human interest, social affairs, culture) rather than 'hard' areas like business, economics or foreign news.[26]

Women responding to the IWMF survey, too, reported that despite their areas of expertise and interests, many women find themselves assigned to 'soft topics' like fashion and entertainment. Further, many women believe that their male colleagues usually get the best assignments—covering the most visible, controversial, newsworthy stories. They also think women journalists are ultimately denied access to opportunities that could further their careers.

According to Gallagher, although this rigid division of labour has started to break down in some places and cases, the vast majority of studies around the world confirms persistent, gender-based segregation in the allocation of work assignments in media organizations even today. Apart from the fact that such stereotyping is unfair and unwarranted in itself, this tendency to stream women and men into different departments and subject areas can have several serious repercussions on women's careers.

Pay Disparities

For one, it can affect both salaries and promotion prospects. The fact that there are salary differences between men and women in the media is confirmed by the International Labour Organisation as well as studies in several European countries, the U.S., New Zealand and Tunisia. According to Torild Skard, this is partly because the topics towards which women are directed have less status, get less prominence and are less likely to even appear in print.[27] Gallagher also thinks it is likely that the disparities are linked to the different kinds of tasks and assignments allocated to women and men in the same job category.[28]

It is difficult to believe that professional women can be denied equal pay for equal work even today, and even in countries with clearly defined laws in this respect. However, this certainly seems to be the case, going by the available data from around the world. According to the IWMF report, 'Although, in 50 per cent of the responses, women stated they are not subjected to a different salary scale, many believe, in fact, that they are being paid less.'

The survey responses suggest that many women journalists are forced to accept lower wages out of necessity or because of competition. Faced with the 'bottle neck' of jobs available to women, with too many women trying to fit into too few positions, accepting a lower wage may sometimes be a survival tactic, says the report. Another possible explanation for women's apparent inability to command better salaries is that, in addition to being socialised to be unassertive and non-confrontational, they often lack any kind of training in negotiation.

Apart from adversely affecting remuneration, the gender division of work assignments can also reduce women's chances of promotion. As Gallagher points out, while a journalist writing about 'hard politics' is supported and regarded as good promotion material, another writing about 'human' and everyday issues—ranked low in the media's scheme of things—tends to be seen as unambitious and therefore undeserving of promotion. This, in turn, can have a negative effect on payment.

Gender-based work assignments often present women in the profession with an additional problem. Even if they are personally interested in topics professionally dismissed as 'soft' and also believe they are important, they often hesitate to cover them lest their prospects for career advancement are adversely affected. At the same time, they know that if they choose to concentrate exclusively on the high-prestige areas hitherto monopolised by men, for the sake of their careers, the other subjects are liable to be neglected: few men are likely to cover such low status areas. Faced with this dilemma, some women take on a double role, covering both 'men's areas' and 'women's topics' of various kinds. But this often means having to put in extra effort and time.

Multiple Pressures

Such difficult choices create additional pressures. Women journalists are more likely than men to experience the working environment in terms of 'control' (by others)—both in terms of getting responses to their own ideas and in terms of control from superiors, Monica Lofgren-Nilsson suggested in a 1994 paper. She found that men experience more freedom in the working environment, possibly because it is more closely adapted to their priorities and needs than to those of women.[29]

Explaining how negative attitudes can inhibit careers, the IWMF report points out that they 'extend far and deep as causes for discrimination. They are often subtle anchors—hard to identify, yet weighing women down nonetheless. The reality that these attitudes are ingrained in social structures and organisational policies is underscored by the frustration of many women who still experience harassment and exclusion from the 'old-boys' network.

According to the report, negative social attitudes are manifested in different ways: stereotypes about working women both in and out of their work environments; pressures from families, peers and, in some cases, religious and educational institutions; traditional beliefs about women's roles that lead to discrimination in access to jobs and in salaries, besides adding to the pressures of balancing work and family.

Conversely, says the report, if women journalists succeed in conquering these barriers, their accomplishments are sometimes downplayed and attributed not to merit but to the misuse of their gender. Some survey respondents also mentioned the backlash they experience when their colleagues—male or female—feel threatened by their efforts to move ahead.

Family vs. Work

Meanwhile, the problem of reconciling the demands of the family, particularly parenthood, with the demands of the job is one of the most widely expressed difficulties for women working in the media everywhere, according to Gallagher. In the IWMF survey, too, respondents overwhelmingly pointed to the problem of 'balancing work and family' as a major obstacle. Obviously, even today, the primary responsibility for childcare remains with women all over the world. Not surprisingly, says the IWMF report, female journalists with children find it extremely difficult to work the long and irregular hours that their male, or childless, counterparts are able to work.

In order to delegate more time for home, the report continues, women often avoid working long hours and pass up opportunities to network with colleagues as well as to participate in after-hour training. This places them at a disadvantage in competing for jobs and assignments. According to the report, 'These "essential extras" that women, like their male counterparts, need to participate in to get ahead leave little time for their families. When they do attempt to take advantage of more professional opportunities, some women feel that their children suffer, their work suffers, or both. The resulting tension between what women hope to achieve in their careers and society's expectations regarding their domestic roles and responsibilities can have a profound impact on women's careers, their families and the companies that they work for.'

Another recent international survey, jointly conducted by the IWMF and the Women's Foreign Policy Group, Washington, on women covering international news, found that the conflicting demands of family and work figured high on the list of obstacles cited by the respondents. 71 per cent of survey respondents said they were the first to be called on—and called away from their jobs—to take care of the family and home. For journalists, especially those on the international beat, the problem is often compounded by the need to travel and to work long and late hours, and the unpredictable nature of breaking news.[30]

When women are forced to choose between their careers and their family, the decisions are rarely easy and there can be as many solutions as individuals, says the IWMF/WFPG report. Some wait until they have established a career before starting a family, others forgo children altogether. Several women stated that they had passed up or given up positions as foreign correspondents in order to have more time at home. Some found their commitment to journalism called into question after they turned down a posting or assignment.

According to the report, some women have reluctantly sacrificed a higher salary for the convenience of more flexible hours. One way some have been able to allow for family time is by turning to freelance work as a primary means of supporting themselves. But, as the report points out, freelancing rarely pays as well as a permanent position with a recognized media organisation. Attempting to juggle professional and private lives, others have moved from positions in the field to jobs in the newsroom. But, according to the report, this compromise can also present both advantages and drawbacks. For example, though the amount of travelling is reduced, the actual hours can sometimes be longer than those kept in the field.

Gallagher highlights the fact that the arrival of more women in the workplace has not changed the organization of work in the media: 'The profession has not adapted to its "feminisation," through the provision of company creches, childcare systems and so on.' According to women interviewed in a 1992 Belgian study by Nicole Baguette, this makes real equality impossible. As one experienced journalist is reported to have remarked: 'I've never known a man who said he wouldn't marry or have a family because if he did he would risk neglecting his work.'[31]

Angela Coyle has argued that organizational procedures and structures usually reflect male norms and priorities because it is men who still occupy key decision-making positions. The most obvious way in which women are disadvantaged is through work organization that still takes little or no account of parental responsibilities.[32]

Role Models

The second most important obstacle identified by respondents to the IWMF survey is the lack of role models for women journalists.

According to the report, 'Entering a work place as the only or one of the only women is an isolating experience. Coupled with the small number of women occupying positions of authority in the media, aspiring women journalists can easily become discouraged ... Women may find it difficult to move ahead when they don't see examples of how it has been done by other women. In a field dominated by men, it is important for women hoping to move into positions of authority to observe the successful work styles of the women who have come before them and the skills they used in overcoming gender-based obstacles.' Survey respondents said the presence or absence of role-models often has a significant impact on what they are able to achieve in their individual careers.

Professional Networks

The IWMF survey highlights another disadvantage faced by women in the profession: their lack of access to critical professional information because of the under-developed state of networking among media women. According to the report, while men have their old boys' networks, similar alliances of women—which could facilitate regular exchange of valuable information—are often not in place. The absence of a women's 'grape-vine' can limit their access to information about fellowships, training opportunities and even promotions. It can also limit their access to contacts who could help them with stories and alert them to special opportunities. As the report points out, all this can have a negative effect on their careers.

Advantages?

Seventy-four per cent of women reporting on international news indicated that they face obstacles their male counterparts do not, says the IWMF/WFPG report. Survey respondents mentioned stereotyping, access to assignments and salary discrimination as major impediments to their careers. On the other hand, 77 per cent of them agreed that there are some advantages to being a woman in international news.

As the report points out, several of these perceived advantages stem from the possibility of turning the tables on those who think that attractiveness and intelligence are mutually exclusive traits. Although being underestimated or treated in a condescending manner can undermine women journalists, many find they can capitalise on these situations. According to the report, 'By using a moment of surprise as an edge to "get your foot in the door," what was once an obstacle can become an advantage. Being dismissed as "cute", "sweet" and even "innocent" can provide an opportunity for a crafty reporter to break a fantastic story.'

In addition, says the report, women often find they have an inside track on very personal stories that male colleagues might overlook or not be able to cover as extensively. Similarly, because women journalists tend to look beyond conflict-driven reporting, they have often been able to redefine the image and accessibility of news.

Gender Perspective

The question of whether or not women bring a new, fresh or even different perspective to their work in the media is controversial all over the world. The IWMF/WFPG report says this was one of the most hotly debated issues of both the survey and the ensuing conference on women reporting on international news.

A little more than half (57 per cent) of the survey respondents said women cover news from a different angle, while 54 per cent said they also tend to cover different stories. According to these respondents, women are able to cover stories with more compassion and a better sense of balance because they see the world through different eyes. Some suggest that the difference stems from 'the basic cultural outlooks of women and men.'

Others propose that women's perspectives and their greater attention to detail in stories are influenced by their experience of juggling many things in their lives, including the often conflicting demands of family and work.

On the whole, those who believe in the existence of a 'female perspective' see it as a positive phenomenon. They say women are more likely than men to see beyond traditional frameworks and to reflect a wider range of perspectives in their work. Thanks to their broader view of things, they say, women are more attuned to the consequences and repercussions of an event or process; men might not deem these aspects of the story newsworthy, if they do not miss them altogether. One example was frequently cited by survey respondents to illustrate gender-based differences in perspective: while men are more often interested in reporting conflict-driven international news attractions, women tend to look for complex stories with a human dimension.

However, a number of women involved in the survey and conference refuted the notion of a 'female perspective' and claimed that gender played no part in their professional conduct. They highlighted the dangers associated with recognizing a women's perspective. If it could be proven that women cover stories differently from men, they pointed out, there would be more justification for assigning stories on the basis of gender alone. They preferred to believe that each journalist brings a unique perspective to his or her work; as each person benefits from different life experiences, so do their stories represent a wide diversity of content.

Similarly, the question of whether women working in the media make a difference to the portrayal of women in the media is contentious. The IWMF report acknowledges 'the rigorous debate about the impact that the presence of women in decision-making positions within the media would have on what many women consider to be a negative and inaccurate portrayal of women' in the media. According to the report, 'Some contend that if more women are making decisions about news and other forms of media, their attitudes about how women should be portrayed would have an impact on what the public sees and hears.' But, it points out, 'This theory remains largely untested.'

At the same time, says the report, some people assert that it is unfair to assume that women in positions of power act in ways and make decisions that are significantly different from anything their male colleagues would do: 'Any one individual woman may or may not want to change the way women are generally portrayed.' They stress the fact that managers—whether men or women—make business decisions based on business considerations.

However, many women journalists responding to the IWMF survey seemed to think that if women were in higher positions in the media they would make decisions to portray women differently. Gallagher agrees that lack of power within the media currently keeps women in the profession from effecting major changes. Nevertheless, she believes that women's increasing numerical strength in the media, together with their entry into decision-making positions, could make a difference.

Otherwise, she says, 'The alternative to "relegation to the women's pages" has been, until quite recently, to become "one of the boys"—an option that involves accepting a particular set of priorities about who and what is important, priorities which traditionally have been determined by men.' Only when there is a 'critical mass' of women in the media, especially in creative and decision-making positions, can they be expected to bring about changes in long-established media practices, routines and priorities, she says. 'There is indeed security in numbers,' concludes Kay Mills, after reviewing thirty years of women's journalism in the US.[33]

This is how Dougary sees the issue: 'While I do not believe that there is a single "woman's point of view" or a unique "feminine sensibility" ... what is clear is that in the areas of the media where women do have an input they can make a difference. It will take several generations of equal numbers of women and men in senior positions in these industries (as in others) to gauge more precisely what difference gender can make to the product, as well as to the working environment.'[34]

Beasley and Gibbons also acknowledge that the debate over whether women have different values and therefore make different news judgments has not been settled.[35] However, a quotation from Katherine Graham, chairperson of *The Washington Post* Company, is significant in this context: 'The gatekeepers, to some extent, control what's in the paper. If more women are in responsible jobs, other topics might get different play.'[36] In other words, when women are in decision-making positions, they may be able to not only prevent gender stereotyping, but also foster new thinking about newsworthiness and ensure more balance in coverage—in terms of both the issues covered and the points of view included.

The Indian Experience

In India, too, there is considerable divergence in mediawomen's views on these questions. These and the other issues they confront today are discussed later on in the book. But, first, as a kind of backdrop, it may be worth recalling the modest study on Indian women in journalism conducted more than a dozen years ago by the Women and Media Group, Mumbai.

Although it was an extremely small and limited exercise, it remains unique in that it elicited the views of women in the profession without any presumptions. The paper, based on the responses of 39 journalists to a questionnaire, was presented at the Third National Conference for Women's Studies in Chandigarh in October 1986.[37] Interestingly, it began thus: 'The last decade has seen a perceptible increase in the number of women in journalism.'

The quantifiable highlights of the survey results were as follows: Sixty-one per cent of the respondents objected to the term 'woman journalist.' While 38 per cent of the respondents said they thought women in the profession were taken seriously, a quarter of them said they were not and an equal number gave a qualified response. Two-thirds of the respondents said their professionalism had never been questioned—whether on account of gender or their strong views on women's issues—but more than a quarter of them said it had. Less than half the sample said their gender did not hinder them in their work; however, more than a quarter of them said it did.

Similarly, 46 per cent of the respondents said their gender did not make it easier for them to get information; while 35 per cent gave a qualified answer, only three respondents felt being a woman was an advantage in this respect. More than half the journalists said they did not face any specific problems at work on account of gender; of those who said they did, most mentioned night work and transport, family attitudes and the attitudes of colleagues as the main problems.

Sixty-nine per cent of the respondents had written on women's issues, all but one out of choice. A little less than half (46 per cent) of the respondents said they felt a special responsibility towards the portrayal of women and the coverage of women's issues in their publications. A high 84 per cent of the journalists objected to the use of sexist language and derogatory terms for women in the press. However, only half of them had tried to do something about it. Nevertheless, nearly three-quarters of the respondents felt that women in the profession had had an impact on the portrayal of women and coverage of women's issues in the press.

From the conclusions listed in the paper, the following impression emerges of the situation of women in the profession in the mid-1980s:

Although women journalists, especially senior ones, were being taken more seriously, they still had to work much harder than men to prove themselves. They were often blamed for situations arising from realities over which they had little control (e.g., the particular dangers faced by women travelling alone at night, the domestic responsibilities shouldered by women, etc.). They also had to deal with the sexist and disparaging attitudes of colleagues and seniors in the press, as well as condescension from sources of news and information.

The most common problem confronting women journalists at the time was late night work. Instead of providing facilities to minimise the problem, some managements were using night work as an excuse to restrict the employment of women. Although the majority of respondents claimed that their professionalism had not been questioned on account of gender and hardly any cases of gender-based harassment were cited, the paper suggests that this could be because the survey was largely limited to the English-language press in metropolitan cities.

Some respondents, even then, felt that notions about women journalists had changed for the better over the years, partly because there were many more women in the field and many of them had 'proved themselves.' As one senior journalist put it, 'So many women in the field have done excellent, tough assignments and sustained serious work that the whole image has changed.' It remains to be seen whether things have indeed changed across the board.

Several years later, when Sharma and I wrote a Postscript for *Whose News?*, we took note of some of the changes that had taken place in the Indian media in the years between the period covered by our study (1979-88) and the writing and eventual publication of the book in the early 1990s. Among them was the remarkable increase in the number of mediawomen who had been able to make a mark in the 'hard' news areas of politics and economics which until then had been virtually all-male bastions.[38]

At the same time, we noted, the self-perception and approach of women in journalism had undergone some shifts in the intervening years. While many women in the press were openly supportive of the issues raised by the women's movement during the period covered in our study, female journalists in the 1990s seemed to be more wary of being labelled as feminists or associated with the women's cause and even of being categorised as 'women journalists.'

We also pointed out that a number of factors had led many women in journalism, earlier noted for their writing on women's and other socio-economic and political issues, to switch to the fast track of 'political' reportage or analysis in the interest of career advancement. Among the factors we identified were: the high visibility and increasingly competitive nature of the profession, the opportunities that had opened up to women in the press, and the persistent assumption that coverage of 'national politics' (narrowly defined to mean the activities and utterances of political parties and personalities) constitutes the acme of journalistic practice.

Several women had already made their way to senior positions within some major newspapers by the early 1990s. But we noted at the time that these positive developments had not made a significant impact on the priorities of the press, whether in terms of the definition of news, the coverage of events and issues, and/or the portrayal of women.

While making these broad statements we recognised the absence of real and reliable information on the situation of women working at various levels in the press. Our own study focussed on the coverage of women's issues in the print media rather than on women media professionals. But we noted the need for a proper inquiry into the working conditions, experiences and opinions of women media professionals in different sections of the press.

There have been some efforts in the interim to highlight the contributions, struggles and successes of Indian women in journalism. A few journalists have written articles, papers and/or books based on their own experiences and observations as media women, while others (including some non-journalists) have based articles, chapters and/or books on interviews with women in the press.[39]

Many in the former category are, naturally, personalised accounts which do not necessarily reflect the experiences of others in the profession. And most in the latter category dwell primarily on the relationship (if any) between female media professionals and the women's movement, and/or on women journalists' contribution (if any) to the media's coverage of women and women's issues.

The Current Situation

With the present project, I have sought to address some of the gaps that still persist in this area. I have tried to examine the issues involved in some depth and to explore the nuances of what women in journalism have to say about themselves, their individual experiences and their profession as a whole.

It seems to me that, despite all the changes that are supposed to have taken place over the past three decades of rapid social transformation across the world, as well as in India, the more things change the more *some* of them at least seem to stay the same.

The increased visibility of women in the Indian media and the obvious recognition and success many of them enjoy today suggest that all is well with the status of women in the profession. However, appearances can often be deceptive. A somewhat different picture begins to appear when one looks beneath the surface, reads between the lines and listens to women talking about their experiences within the press.

The Present Project

As explained in the Preface, this book is based on the inputs of more than 200 Indian women working as journalists in the print media in different parts of the country, as well as a few places outside it. The themes explored in each chapter emerged from the face-to-face conversations I had with nearly 200 of them and the thirty-five responses to my questionnaire that I received.

As mentioned earlier, the selection of interviewees was fairly arbitrary, although I did attempt to include as representative a sample of women in the profession as possible under the circumstances. Apart from striving for a geographic and linguistic spread, I tried to ensure the inclusion of women journalists of different ages and levels of experience, who represent different persuasions and perspectives, and who are engaged in different spheres of journalistic activity.

In the end, I was able to personally meet women journalists in the four metropolitan cities: Calcutta, Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai; three state capitals: Bangalore, Hyderabad and Thiruvananthapuram; and three other cities: Kochi, Kottayam and Pune. In addition, I received responses to questionnaires from women working in Ahmedabad, Guwahati, Jaipur, Panaji, Ranchi and Vishakapatnam (although I am still disappointed that the many, many more contacted in far-flung places did not respond). I also received inputs from a few Indian women working as journalists in other parts of the world: Geneva, London and Singapore.

The sample includes women active in both the English press and a cross-section of the Indian language press: Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil and Telugu.

The final count may be loaded in favour of women in newspapers, despite their presence in larger numbers and at important posts in a wide variety of magazines. This is only because, while the magazine world in India has traditionally been relatively open to women, the world of Indian newspapers has only slowly and lately opened up to them.

I personally do not subscribe to the traditional hierarchies of 'hard' and 'soft' news, reporting vs. feature writing vs. copy-editing, and so on, that often operate within the profession. Nor do I believe that newspapers and newsmagazines belong to a higher order of publication than specialised magazines, including those aimed primarily at a female audience. However, I think it is always interesting to learn about and from the experiences of those who have had to struggle against the odds to reach where they are. Hence the special focus on women in newspapers.

Well aware of the different viewpoints that exist among women in the profession, especially on gender-related matters, I was extremely conscious of the need to enable each person to freely voice her opinion on every point I raised. From the question of their responses to the term 'woman journalist' to the question of whether or not gender makes any difference to professional experiences, perspectives and/or work culture, I made it clear to the interviewees that my purpose was to find out what *they* thought about some of these issues, not to confirm or contradict my own preconceived notions. I tried my best to avoid communicating any presumptions through my questions.

The result is, expectedly, a patchwork of experiences and perspectives. Nevertheless, my conversations with this cross-section of Indian women in journalism suggest that they are grappling with many of the issues identified by their counterparts across the world. At the same time, they confirm that gender is just one of the many factors that influence their choices and experiences within the profession and in society as a whole.

I have attempted to faithfully represent the diversity of opinion among women working as journalists in the Indian print media, as well as to record the variety of experiences women have had in the profession. While the differences in both experiences and viewpoints are interesting, what is equally fascinating to me are the similarities in the ideas and attitudes of women from different backgrounds in various parts of the country and at different levels in the profession.

In keeping with the basic purpose of this book—to enable women in journalism to speak for themselves—I have deliberately used extensive quotes from the interviews throughout the chapters that follow. I have attempted to construct the arguments around each issue through the voices of the women who shared their thoughts with me, keeping my own voice on low volume except where my experiences and views as a journalist are relevant. Of course, my perspectives as a participant in, and critical observer of, the media, particularly the press, have naturally influenced the entire enterprise.

I have appended the names and designations of the women quoted in the book and refer to them only by name after the first reference in the main body of the book. This is mainly in the interest of readability. But it is also in keeping with the spirit of the book which, as I have mentioned in the Preface, is not meant to be a who's who of Indian women in journalism but an exploration of the world of Indian journalism through the eyes of women situated at different vantage points in the profession.

The interviews were conducted during various periods between April 1997 and August 1998. Several interviewees have moved to different publications and/or posts since I met them. Since it has not been possible for me to keep track of all the changed circumstances, the *status quo* at the time of the interview has been maintained in all cases.

In deference to many colleagues in the profession who question the validity of classifying professionals by gender and the few who are almost allergic to the terms 'woman journalist' or 'women journalists,' I have tried to minimise their use (except in connection with the Chameli Devi Jain Award which, incidentally, has since 1992 been conferred on Outstanding Women Mediapersons).

Although I personally see the category as merely descriptive, I present my colleagues' divergent views on the matter in Chapter 2, along with their thoughts on the possible impact of gender on journalistic perspectives and responsibilities, and the impact of mediawomen on the press (if any).

Some journalists dismiss the notion that gender can affect professional practice, perspectives and progress. However, the majority seem to believe that it does. At the same time, many make the point that gender is particularly disadvantageous in combination with other problematic identities. Chapters 3 to 9 are devoted to an exploration of the different ways in which women experience gender and associated factors in their professional lives.

In Chapter 3, for example, they outline some of the more subtle ways in which gender impedes their work. Chapter 4 focusses attention on the problems women have faced and many continue to face at the basic levels of recruitment and remuneration. In Chapter 5 women discuss the difficulties of 'entering the mainstream' in terms of work assignments. Chapter 6 reveals that night work continues to be a contentious issue for women in the profession. In Chapter 7 women describe the apparently perpetual and universal dilemma of work vs. family, which many believe is exacerbated by the long and irregular working hours demanded by the profession. Chapter 8 deals with the tension and unease that still seem to characterise relationships between male and female colleagues in many places. And in Chapter 9 women debate the existence of a glass ceiling between themselves and the editorial summit.

The remaining chapters go beyond such specific problem areas. For instance, Chapter 10 discusses the possible impact of the wider social and cultural environment in which media women operate on their experiences within the profession. In Chapter 11 the older and younger generations of women in journalism comment on each other. Chapter 12 examines the possibilities of networking and mentoring among women in the media. In Chapter 13 women talk about their hopes and fears in the context of recent developments in the press. And, finally, Chapter 14 offers a brief summary of the overall situation and some pointers to constructive action for positive change.

Summary of experiences and opinions from the 1996 IWMF study:*

- 93 per cent of survey respondents believe they face professional obstacles no encountered by their male colleagues and 74 percent do not believe their male colleagues recognise these obstacles as problems for women.
- Among the most common obstacles faced by female journalists are the challenges of balancing work and family (49 per cent).
- Lack of role models is also seen as an obstacle by a large number of women (44 per cent).
- 38 per cent of respondents cited access to jobs, especially in non-traditional fields such as defence, business, science and technology, as an obstacle.
- 38 per cent also pointed out that they are paid less than they should be.
- Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of respondents independently added comments regarding negative attitudes towards women in the workplace and negative stereotype about women in general as professional obstacles within the media.

* See note 24 in the Notes section

2

What's a Woman Journalist?

I don't see the need to slap gender onto a profession.
Madhu Jain

In 1986, the Women and Media Group, Mumbai, conducted a modest, informal survey of Indian women in journalism. Nearly two-thirds of the women in different parts of the country who responded to the questionnaire objected to the term 'woman journalist'. The rest were divided equally between those who did not find the term offensive and those who were not sure how they felt about it.

The situation has not changed significantly since then. While only a few women in the profession are vehemently opposed to the term, most confess that they are uncomfortable with what they perceive to be an unnecessary and, indeed, unflattering label. They are particularly concerned about the negative connotations of a gender-based category among professionals.

Tavleen Singh, columnist and television journalist, is well-known for her antipathy to the term. She firmly believes that only those who wish to hide behind a protective label to make up for their own professional inadequacies would want to be thus grouped by gender.

Anita Pratap, chief of bureau (South Asia), Cable News Network (CNN), New Delhi, also prefers not to be classified by gender, although she does not put it in quite those terms. According to her, 'The fact that I am a woman or an Indian or that I speak a particular language or come from a particular region does not make a difference because it does not colour my perspective as a journalist in any way. Sensitivity and humanness are not necessarily a woman's prerogative. Similarly, courage is not necessarily a male characteristic. It is a question of individual personality and temperament. I don't believe it has anything to do with gender.'

According to Hyderabad-based photojournalist Sipra Das, 'One should never consider gender in any profession. These days I no longer consider myself different from men. Though the pushing and jostling in the crowd affected me initially, now I don't care. My job is to capture the moment and I am as aggressive as the men around me.'[1]

Pejorative Prefix?

Many journalists see the term as a pejorative label, suggesting inferiority or disability. As Guwahati-based freelance journalist Mitra Phukan puts it, 'The prefix "woman" before "journalist" seems to crave the reader's indulgence for certain extenuating factors which make the writing less than that of a "man journalist." I object to the term because it is patronising and implies that women need a crutch to lean on.' Madhu Jain, senior editor, *India Today,* New Delhi, agrees: 'At present it is a negative label, implying some kind of handicap.'

Others find the term demeaning because it seems to obscure their achievements and status as professionals and to portray them as somehow less than equal to their male counterparts. Sajeda Momin, assistant editor, *The Statesman,* Calcutta, mentions as an example a luncheon hosted by the United States Information Service (USIS) for senior women journalists of Calcutta: 'I objected to the whole concept. I am a senior journalist of Calcutta, not just a senior woman journalist.'

Manimala, editor, *Vanita* (Hindi), is noted for her coverage in the Hindi press of human rights issues, including women's oppression. But even she admits that, while she is not exactly allergic to the term, she prefers not to be specially identified or introduced as a woman journalist. 'I am a full-fledged journalist,' she asserts. Bharati S. Pradhan, consulting editor, *Savvy,* Mumbai, has a similar argument: 'I consider myself a journalist full stop—not a woman journalist or a film journalist.'

Some mediapersons believe that highlighting gender can work against their professional interests. For instance, Sushila Ravindranath, chief of bureau (south), *Business India,* Chennai, says, 'When I began working in Chennai in the mid-1980s, 99 per cent of the time I was dealing with men in business and industry. If I had projected myself as a woman journalist I wouldn't have got anywhere. I had to think of myself and present myself purely as a business journalist.' Saswati Chakravarti, deputy editor, *The Economic Times,* Bangalore, agrees that it can be a disadvantage to be perceived as a woman. 'The less they see you as a woman the better for you,' she says. 'You have to make sure that you are not saying or doing the expected things.'

Yet others are opposed to the term because they believe it is no longer relevant. As Mumbai-based freelance journalist Meena Menon puts it, 'Now that there are so many women in the profession, the label sounds a bit odd. It was perhaps necessary to highlight gender some years ago, when there were fewer female journalists around.' Similarly, Rita Manchanda, special correspondent, Plus Channel, New Delhi, believes gender-blind terms are more appropriate now that women are no longer typecast by the subjects on which they write or the areas of journalism in which they work. Prema Vishwanathan, senior editor, *Asian Chemical News,* Singapore, also thinks gender is becoming less and less significant in journalism. According to her, 'Over the years I have found that there were fewer and fewer barriers to cross.'

Another view is that such an appellation is not valid unless it has been earned in some way. For example, Shikha Mukherjee, chief of bureau, *The Times of India,* Calcutta, thinks it would be hypocritical for her to accept the label when she has done nothing to deserve it: 'I am a journalist who happens to be a woman. I have always worked in the mainstream press and haven't consciously contributed towards making it different. In fact, I think I deliberately obliterated gender from my consciousness as a professional and just rolled along with the mainstream.'

Manini Chatterjee, head, Indian News Network (INN), New Delhi, thinks it is ultimately a matter of individual perspective: 'Some people see gender as a significant factor of their identity, others want to transcend the fact of being a woman and be treated as a person.' However, she does have reservations about over-emphasising gender. 'Just as the male patriarchal order does not acknowledge that women are complete persons, the feminist movement, by highlighting gender, tends to reinforce the divide and prevent women from transcending gender, as we can in many aspects of life,' she says.

Positive Connotations

Of those who have no objection to the term, freelance journalist Shahnaz Anklesaria Aiyar is perhaps the most assertive, accepting it as an entirely positive description: 'Why woman journalist? Why not? I think my gender makes me an even better journalist, constantly questioning established opinion.'

Others stress the need to acknowledge gender in order to create role models, encourage new generations of women to enter the profession and provide spaces within the press to discuss gender-related issues.

'I wear it as a label,' says Pamela Philipose, senior editor, *The Indian Express*, New Delhi. 'I make no bones about it. I think it is important to assert the fact that I am a woman and a journalist.' Although she understands why some women do not wish to be labelled, she believes in keeping the issue of gender alive because 'there are too many silences and marginalized issues in journalism in any case.'

The question of example seems to be particularly crucial in places where women's presence in the press is still negligible and their position in it precarious. For example, Parvathy Devi R, sub-editor/reporter, *Deshabhimani,* Thiruvananthapuram, says, 'I am proud to be known as a woman journalist in Kerala. I see it as a social need. If I function well as a woman journalist I can set an example for others.'

Vishakapatnam-based freelance journalist Navata also believes it is important to spotlight women's growing presence in the high profile and traditionally male world of journalism in order to counter age-old ideas about gender-segregated professions. According to her, 'This will not only encourage newcomers but also have an impact on women at large. I think such trends should be highlighted because they contribute to the democratization of social norms.'

Interestingly, however, freelance journalist Devyani Bhardwaj of Jaipur has a different view on this. 'As it is, women become journalists after overcoming the familial and social taboos heaped on them just because they are women,' she points out. 'Then, once they are journalists, they find they are still treated as second class citizens and face discrimination.' She thinks the term 'woman journalist' just compounds the problem.

While some women are apprehensive about the negative connotations of the term, they acknowledge its validity in certain contexts. For instance, C. Vanaja, staff correspondent, *The Andhra Pradesh Times,* Hyderabad, says she is uncomfortable with the term when it is used in male company because it seems then to imply inferiority: 'However, I don't feel awkward when it is used in a women's gathering or during discussions about gender-specific problems within the profession.'

Some women point out that, while they themselves may not think of themselves as 'women journalists' and would prefer to be seen just as professionals, there is no guarantee that others will not perceive them differently on account of gender. As Navata points out, women may prefer to be identified as human beings but they are constantly forced by society to remember that they belong to the 'second sex'.

Similarly, C.G. Manjula, senior sub-editor, *Prajavani,* Bangalore, suggests that both the system and the attitudes of individuals within the profession ensure that gender is willy-nilly brought into the picture. And, according to Parvathi Menon, chief of bureau, *Frontline,* Bangalore, people often presume that it is gender that makes a journalist particularly interested in, and sensitive to, certain subjects—especially those relating to women, children and families.

Mrinal Pande, former editor (*Vama* and *Dainik Hindustan*) and senior editorial advisor/news anchor, New Delhi Television, Delhi, is impatient with the reluctance of many women professionals to be associated with their gender. 'Women must be the only species in the world which expects to be taken seriously without taking itself seriously,' she says. 'So many women seem to be deeply insecure about being women. At the same time they want to be taken seriously as journalists.'

'I think it is only natural that people see you and react to you first as a woman,' she says. 'Your gender is a vital part of your personality; your gender identity is a major part of your overall identity. Why deny something that is so obvious? What is the point of trying to present a degendered image to the world? Besides, what do you fill the vacuum with?'

'I am happy to be identified as a woman,' she declares. 'I want to be taken seriously as a woman, judged by the highest professional standards, on a par with male contemporaries in the profession. By stating that I am a woman and an editor, I'm neither showing off nor making excuses. The fact that I am a woman and an editor demonstrates that women have arrived. It also challenges the traditional assumption that editors are male.'

'There seems to be a tacit acceptance of the false notion that everything that is positive and assertive is male,' she points out. 'I believe that, to be taken seriously, I have to first take myself seriously. If I don't hesitate to associate with women as a species, both I and my species are likely to be taken more seriously. By denying my gender I would be robbing myself of an essential and valuable aspect of myself. Dalits went through a similar identity crisis earlier—before they gathered the courage and confidence, through participation in the democratic process, to assert their identity as Dalits. I would like to see that happening to women.'

Common Characteristics?

Interestingly, many journalists who disapprove of the classification of professionals by gender also volunteer the opinion that women in the profession share certain positive characteristics.

For example, Shiraz Sidhwa, chief of bureau (South Asia), *Far Eastern Economic Review,* New Delhi, admits that she was not very happy when she received the Chameli Devi Jain Award 'because it is an award for women journalists'. But she also adds, 'Actually, it is not a negative label. Women as a whole are better journalists. They are more conscientious, more thorough and more hardworking ... If I were to hire a journalist, I would look seriously at women.' Similarly, Leela Menon, special correspondent, *The Indian Express,* Kochi, sees the term 'woman journalist' as a derogatory label but asserts that women in the profession are 'more multi-dimensional and not only tackle a wider range of subjects but treat them better'.

There seems to be a broad consensus on certain qualities associated with journalists who are women. For example, the words conscientious, sincere, committed, earnest, responsible, dependable, hardworking, efficient, thorough, meticulous, fastidious, and so on, are repeatedly used by a wide range of female journalists to describe the characteristics women bring to their jobs in the press. Many in the profession also believe that women—in both the English and the vernacular press—tend to have a better command over language as well as better writing skills than most men. In addition, women in the profession are widely seen as less corrupt and corruptible, as a group, than some of their male counterparts (more on this later). Few seem to dispute these obvious generalizations.

A number of journalists also point out that women in the profession tend to have more staying power than their male colleagues, especially when it comes to consistent coverage of undramatic and non-glamorous but important processes. For example, in Mumbai, Jyoti Punwani, Rupa Chinai, Teesta Setalvad and Pushpa Iyengar stayed for years with certain significant but slowly developing stories of the 1980s. Among these were the prolonged hearings of the Justice Lentin Commission of Inquiry into medical negligence in a government hospital and 'the Antulay case' (a long-drawn-out corruption case involving a former chief minister of Maharashtra). More recently, Punwani and Meher Pestonji were the only journalists who attended virtually every hearing of the Justice Srikrishna Commission of Inquiry into the 1992-93 communal violence in Mumbai, which concluded its work only in 1998.

Some see evidence of women's steadfastness in other aspects of work, too. According to Chakravarti, for example, 'In a crisis situation, women generally come out better. They are more steady as human beings.'

In addition, almost everyone agrees that women have contributed significantly to broadening the scope of press coverage. It is not just that many of them have chosen to write on what are generally known as 'women's issues'. They are also seen to have taken a lead in increasing coverage in the media of a broad range of other issues related to human development and rights, social and economic justice, culture and other vital aspects of life and society that were earlier neglected by a press traditionally preoccupied with politics and government. Women are also widely credited with having introduced more human interest into the media.

As Nupur Basu, senior correspondent, New Delhi Television, Bangalore, puts it, 'Women have the language skills as well as the creativity to think of angles and images that will stay in people's minds. Women have also brought in fresh thinking and ideas, challenging the *status quo* as well as *status quoist* notions.'

Gendered Perspective?

But the question of whether women bring any special perspective to their work as journalists seems to be more contentious. Manchanda, for one, does not believe gender necessarily determines the perspective or areas of interest of a journalist.

On the other hand, Pande asserts that being a woman is an integral part of her professional persona: 'Knowingly or unknowingly, personal experience does influence the stands you take on a number of issues. As a journalist you are constantly taking stands, whether it is through your choice of subject, the angle from which you approach it or the conclusions that you draw. Your life and experiences as a woman, your gut reactions as a daughter or mother, do play a role in forming your opinions. You should accept it as an organic part of your output.'

Similarly, Shobhaa Dé (Mumbai-based columnist, author and former editor) believes that everything is influenced by gender. She says she has never tried to camouflage that fact: 'I don't believe it is possible to free yourself from gender. I think it is unnatural and self-conscious to strive to achieve gender neutrality.'

Jain suggests that women bring more passion and depth to media coverage of news and issues and are more likely than not to put faces onto issues and numbers. She also believes that women tend to focus media attention on social trends, possibly because they, more than their male counterparts, have the sensibility required to perceive subtle changes within society. At the same time, she says, 'It is not clear whether they actually bring in another worldview or take on the prevailing norms of the profession.'

Sidhwa, who asserts that she doesn't think of herself as a 'woman journalist', nevertheless believes 'women write more sensitively about some subjects because they are more empathetic and more interested in those issues.' When she reads the papers, she says, she specifically looks for stories by certain writers and most of these happen to be women.

Some people suggest that women usually have a more holistic perspective than men, possibly because of the wider range of interests, activities and responsibilities they generally have in their daily lives. According to Dina Vakil, resident editor, *The Times of India,* Mumbai, 'Women tend not to have tunnel vision. They are usually more multi-layered and interested in a variety of things.'

Ritu Sarin, chief of bureau (investigations), *The Indian Express,* New Delhi, prefers what she calls 'a broad canvas' to any specialized area of writing. But she, too, believes that 'women tend to look at the whole picture and not just the who, what, when and where of an event—maybe because they play so many roles in their lives.' Aditi De, chief sub-editor, *Sunday Herald* (*Deccan Herald*), Bangalore, also thinks women are usually more sensitive and more likely to see things 'in the round', probably because of the nature of their upbringing.

However, Anklesaria Aiyar echoes the opinion of many journalists when she asserts that differences in perspective depend more on each individual's interests and convictions than on gender per se. She suggests, however, that being conscious of gender issues does make a person a fighter, which can be a commendable quality in a journalist.

She goes on to dispute the popular view that commitment to an ideology, such as feminism, is a professional handicap. According to her, feminism has helped rather than hindered her in her work: 'It has made me develop a more sceptical, questioning attitude towards everything, including sources of information and forms of authority, which makes for good journalism. What's more, as part of a global movement, you become a citizen of the world and are exposed to various worldviews, and this equips you to write with insight even on international relations.' She believes that any possible negative fallout of identifying with an ideology—in terms of style or tone—can be overcome by a good professional.

'Some women bring in different perspectives, others don't,' says Neerja Chowdhury, political editor, *The Indian Express,* New Delhi. But she thinks that women are still, on the whole, not 'too *blasé*'. At the same time, she points out, the longer you remain in the profession the less likely you are to retain a fresh perspective. Citing the example of her own coverage of the Nellie massacres in Assam in the 1980s, when she opted to focus primarily on the children killed and orphaned in the carnage as well as the youngsters who participated in the violence, she wonders aloud whether she would make the same choice today. Her conclusion: 'Perhaps not. Maybe now I would deal with the tragedy of the children in a softer, human interest piece but not as the main story. At the time that was the only story I wanted to write.'

According to Sharda Ugra, senior sports reporter, *The Hindu,* Mumbai, routine sports coverage does not accommodate any special 'women's perspective' and she is usually not conscious of her gender while writing. 'However,' she says, 'it is possible that in an unconscious attempt not to be "too female", one could miss a human story. After all, sports is not just a numbers game.' But, she points out, any sensitive journalist—and not just a woman—should be able to pick up such a story.

Special Responsibility?

The question of whether women in journalism have a special responsibility on account of their gender arouses strong feelings on both sides of the divide. While some journalists reject outright the idea that they are duty-bound to promote the cause of fellow women, others not only accept the additional responsibility but bemoan the fact that many women in the field shun it. Yet others see women's issues as just one of the many areas they think it is their professional duty to cover, if only because they merit coverage.

Some of the reluctance to be identified with women's issues can be traced back to the stereotyping many women faced when they first entered the field. For example, many pioneers point out that in the early days they were automatically asked to cover events of 'feminine' interest, like flower shows, and to write light columns for women. Since these were seen within the profession as insignificant, peripheral activities, it was but natural that they would want to get out of the rut as soon as they could.

As Delhi-based columnist and author Promilla Kalhan says, 'We used to think women's issues were a grade below the rest. We didn't want to be stuck as "women reporters" and tried to avoid writing on women-related subjects as much as possible. Now there is more consciousness that these issues are also important.'

Likewise, it is perhaps not surprising that among the next batch of women, who entered the press in the 1960s and early '70s and struggled to shed the 'women's beat', many steered clear of doing anything that might jeopardize their hard-won acceptance as regular, mainstream professionals. Of course, there were exceptions, like Usha Rai, who did what they had to whether or not they were typecast in the process.

Bangalore-based freelance journalist Gita Aravamudan, who now writes a weekly column on gender-related issues, admits that she had the customary contempt for 'women's subjects' at the beginning of her career. She says she was then unaware that they could include a wide range of issues other than those traditionally assumed to be of interest to women. 'It is only after I interviewed nurses and nuns from Kerala in the early 1970s and wrote about their problems that I realized that there was a whole new angle that I had been missing. From then onwards I began looking for the women's angle in every story,' she says.

By the mid to late 1970s, when many more women entered the press, feminism was already 'in the air' and the first stirrings of an Indian women's movement were being felt. A number of women who became journalists during this period were influenced by the ideas and events of their time and brought their new consciousness into their work in the media.

I know because I was one of them. In the process of working towards a degree in communications at an American university in the mid-1970s, I had taken a few courses in sociology, some of which would today be part of women's or gender studies. I remember returning to India in 1977, fired with the idea of putting my new-found awareness to use through my profession. I not only found kindred spirits in the women's magazine I joined in Mumbai but witnessed at close quarters the emergence of the contemporary women's movement in the country. Those were exciting times.

But, naturally, even in the revolutionary 1970s and '80s, many women stayed away from these issues for personal or professional reasons or both. As Manimala says, individual concerns and convictions, rather than gender, determine the path taken by women in journalism. According to her, she was the only one of the six women working in the *Navbharat Times* in the 1980s who wrote on women's issues.

For many women in the field, there was (and is) little to choose between women's issues and what are popularly assumed to be areas of feminine interest since both can lead to marginalization. As Jyoti Shukla, senior feature writer, *Navbharat Times,* Mumbai, puts it, 'I didn't want to be identified with women's issues or be confined to women's pages, health, cookery, etc.'

Nevertheless, as Philipose points out, a number of journalists were conscientized by the events and discussions that followed the Supreme Court's 1980 judgment in the Mathura rape case and at least 'some of them have continued highlighting these issues no matter what the prevailing fashion.'

Because of the high visibility of women's issues in the 1980s, thanks largely to the nascent women's movement in the country, some journalists who had earlier consciously kept away from such issues found themselves being drawn into that orbit. For instance, Bachi J Karkaria, senior editor, *The Times of India,* Mumbai, says she felt a *'noblesse oblige'* to write on women's issues when, in 1980, she became the first woman in *The Statesman,* Calcutta, as well as the first and only female assistant editor in the paper. According to her, it was that experience which made her aware of the need to see events and issues from a women's perspective.

Things have obviously not changed much at *The Statesman* in this respect. As the only female assistant editor in the paper now, Sajeda Momin says she is expected to write editorials on women-related topics even though she has never been particularly interested in gender issues.

Today, once again, many in the profession prefer not to be associated with any cause, let alone women's issues, at least partly because of changing ideas within the profession about the media's role in society. What is remarkable, however, is that despite the general climate and the shrinking spaces for coverage of such issues in the media today, a number of young women in the field seem to consider gender an important issue to focus on.

Young Blood

Swati Bhattacharjee, senior sub-editor (features), *The Telegraph,* Calcutta, is one such young woman. According to her, she writes on both women's issues and other subjects but finds that her awareness of gender permeates all her writing. However, she adds, 'Not all women necessarily have a gender angle in their work. Even if they are aware of their own rights—to equality, dignity, privacy, and so on—they don't necessarily identify with the community of women.'

Some women see it as a question of professional responsibility. According to Smruti Koppikar, principal correspondent, *India Today,* Mumbai, 'Women's issues are part of the basket of issues I would push to write on—not because I'm a woman but because they are important and because they relate to a section of society that doesn't easily find a voice in the media.'

Devika Sequeira, chief correspondent—Goa, *Deccan Herald,* Panaji, also sees women's issues as questions of injustice which need to be covered by the press. She does not approve of any gender-based segregation of issues because she thinks 'there is greater danger of trivialization if you categorize them as women's issues.'

Meena Menon says she has considered women's issues both interesting and important ever since she was introduced to them by a female colleague in the news agency she worked for in the 1980s. She thinks women are naturally more sympathetic to issues like rape and dowry deaths because of personal identification and empathy, whereas many men tend to look on rape, for example, as something women ask for. But, she stresses, that is not the reason why she has chosen to cover women's issues. 'I feel they ought to be highlighted,' she says, 'not just because I am a woman but because journalism should be about matters that concern and affect people and about things that need to be changed.'

Jain suggests that there is a generational difference in journalists' reasons for writing on women's issues. According to her, those who risked ghettoization by writing on women's issues in the early days were motivated by idealism and the spirit of struggle. 'Now,' she says, 'focussing on gender often seems to be a means to an end—a ticket to Cairo, Beijing or some other international destination.'

It is true that those who chose to write on women's issues in the old days had more to lose than gain and that today the incentives and rewards can be quite attractive (though it must be said that these are not widely or uniformly accessible). However, lollipops do not seem to be the primary motivating factor for many a young woman in the field today. In fact, given the present climate in the media, being associated with unpopular causes is, if anything, more risky now than before. Yet a number of youngsters seem to be brave enough to try and buck the trend, often entirely voluntarily.

Some of them are, of course, assigned to the new avatar of the women's beat. For instance, Vineetha Gopi, reporter, *Malayala Manorama,* Thiruvananthapuram, says she is generally sent to cover women's events and issues. 'Maybe it's because I'm a woman,' she says, 'but, in any case, I'm also interested in them.' However, she admits that she would not like to write only on women's issues because of the danger of getting typecast and marginalized.

But for others it is a question of professional choice. For example, Priyanka Kakodkar, staff reporter, *The Times of India,* Mumbai, says she is 'not bothered about being stereotyped'. As far as she is concerned, women constitute one disadvantaged group in society and she would not want to ignore the issues that concern and affect them. She does admit, however, that she would find writing only about women's issues restrictive.

According to Shabnam Minwala, junior assistant editor, *The Times of India,* Mumbai, 'Our generation has little idealism left. But the little that remains seems to be with women. For most young people today, the most important thing is to be successful. Some women are like that, too, but there are more women around who are prepared to fight the system and do whatever they can.'

Anita Rao Kashi, senior city correspondent, *The Times of India,* Bangalore, agrees that a significant number of women still come into the field motivated by ideals, wanting to bring about changes in the system, seriously believing in their work and trusting that something positive will come out of what they are doing. Saloni Meghani, staff reporter, *The Times of India,* Mumbai, also points out that while there are several idealistic young women in the profession, determined to write on the issues that matter, young male journalists tend not to be so idealistic. At least, suggests Minwala, 'They get hardened faster.'

Inherent Dangers

But cynicism or, at least, pragmatism can set in fairly early in today's media world. Chandrima Bhattacharya, sub-editor (features), *The Telegraph,* Calcutta, is personally interested in gender issues and, in fact, joined the paper to work on its women's pages. However, today she has come to the conclusion that 'it is important not to identify yourself with women's or other social issues. If they suspect that you have a cause, you are bound to have problems.'

Kalpana Sharma, assistant editor, *The Hindu,* Mumbai, agrees that identification with causes can work against career interests. According to her, people with clear convictions which are at variance with the so-called mainstream are at a disadvantage in the profession today. For instance, she says, strong feminist views may be accommodated but they are not liked.

Bhattacharya cites a practical reason for not getting locked into writing on women's issues. 'It is essential for women to step out of confined spaces within the hierarchy of newspapers if they wish to grow and rise in the profession,' she says. 'In the process, of course, there may be fewer people left to write on women's issues. It is a difficult choice but you have to choose: either you are selfless and work on issues but sacrifice your career, or you think about your career and step out of women's issues.'

Also, she says, 'If women go on writing about women's issues and only women read what they write, it remains a closed debate. I think women should also write about things that men are interested in and, ideally, men should write about emotional matters. It is important for both to come out of gender-based ghettos. Ideally there should be no separation on gender lines in terms of who writes on what.'

Sandhya Taksale, chief sub-editor, *Saptahik Sakal,* Pune, also believes that both men and women in the profession should feel responsible for covering all important subjects, including women's issues. However, she is critical of women who deliberately stay away from such issues: 'They must have a complex. They must be trying to prove something.' She agrees that it is not good for any journalist to be stereotyped but she believes that it is possible to write on women's issues without being stamped a feminist. Besides, she says, 'If you are interested in something, you should focus on it, not do something else just to show others. Your own interests and concerns should be your guide. Ultimately, you have to be true to yourself.'

As Meena Menon puts it, 'By our steering clear of women's issues they don't cease to exist. It is necessary to examine why you are in the writing business. If it is basically just a career option, perhaps breaking into traditional male bastions will help you get ahead. But I think that's a silly way to look at it. Although some women journalists who have ignored women's issues have done well in their careers, for me that's not the point. Besides, I don't believe it's necessarily true that you can't do well if you write on such issues.'

But, according to Neerja Chowdhury, who switched to covering politics after years of being associated with human rights and women, her acclaimed reports and columns in *The Statesman* on those issues were possible in the 1980s, when the media scene was quite different: 'They existed within a milieu. I was interested in and chose to write on those subjects and the management supported the concept.'

Today, she says, 'Women in the profession have to decide whether they want to establish themselves or flog women's issues.

Most have chosen the former alternative. Many women don't write on women's issues because they don't want to be pushed into a ghetto. Newspapers are still open to at least controversial stories on these subjects but even that space is hardly being used because journalists are afraid of being stereotyped.'

Chowdhury also believes it is important to 'delink women in certain professions from what they can or must do for their less fortunate sisters.' She thinks it is unfortunate that these two separate issues are often seen as one. 'For example, whenever there is a discussion on women in politics the inevitable question comes up: what have they done for other women? No such questions are asked about men,' she points out.

According to Parvathi Menon, 'The term "feminist journalist" and the notion of a feminist perspective in journalism are limiting because they tend to impose on women alone the onus of a responsible, balanced, many-sided and gender-sensitive approach. I believe the best of journalists—men and women—should have such an approach.'

However, quite a few women believe that this is too idealistic a vision, at least for the present. Usha Rai, features editor, *The Hindustan Times,* New Delhi, is one of them. Commenting on the current situation, she says, 'I wish women in the profession were a little more sensitive to the issue of gender. If we don't fight for ourselves who is going to do it? Unfortunately, in their attempt to reach the top, women tend to desensitize themselves. When I came into the press there were hardly any women in it and no one was writing on these issues. Later there were many women, writing on a wide range of issues. Now, again, they seem to be trying to dissociate themselves from such issues in favour of career paths that can lead to the top jobs.'

An Indian journalist who now works in London suggests that the situation in the UK is not very different. According to her, she is one of the few women still willing to do 'women's subjects' in the British organization she is with. Most 'serious women' in the profession seem to be unwilling to tackle them and most male colleagues seem to be surprised when a woman perceived as a good professional opts to cover them, she says.

She considers herself lucky that both she and her current female boss are 'in complete agreement that if we don't talk about women's issues nobody will'. Now that she is in a department headed by a woman and with several women on the staff, she is more confident than before about bringing up story ideas relating to these issues in meetings. 'You have to be very strong to withstand the incomprehension and sometimes even smirks on male faces when you say you want to do a "woman's story"', she points out.

According to her, 'At such times you begin to think that if women are now getting jobs in the media with relative ease it may well be because there is no danger that their perspective is going to intrude on media content.' She points out that many media women seem to have exactly the same perspectives as their male colleagues on stories and other professional matters. 'I sometimes wonder whether it is their own perspective or one that they've learnt to adopt early in life as the easiest route to getting on in the world,' she says.

Perceptible Impact?

If there is no agreement on whether professionals should be identified or categorized by gender, whether gender makes a difference to professional perspectives and whether women in journalism have a special responsibility to write on gender-related issues, it is not surprising that there is considerable ambivalence about whether the increasing presence of women in the press has had any impact on media organizations or media content.

Sharma is of the opinion that it has: 'Women *have* made a difference to the coverage of social issues in general, not just women's issues. They tend to speak out and write on them whatever the general policy of their publication may be. These are not easy subjects to write on but women are choosing to cover them despite the prevailing culture in the media, where taking the easy way out seems to be the norm.'

Several women from outside the metropolitan cities also suggest that women's increasing presence in the media has made a difference to content. For instance, both Asha Mathur (correspondent/section editor, *Samachar Jagat,* Jaipur) and Rajkumari Rohila (staff journalist, *Samachar Jagat Sandhya Kaleen,* Jaipur) believe that female professionals have been able to give more prominence to women's issues in the media, as a result of which the government, too, has become more aware of these issues.

Similarly, Ranchi-based Vasavi thinks the presence of women has made a great difference to the content of the press, with more coverage being given to certain issues and less sensationalism in that coverage. As an example, she points to her own coverage of a case in which a block development officer in Santal Parganas had raped a tribal girl. She had chosen to focus attention on the perpetrator of the crime rather than the victim. According to her, 'Being a woman changes the focus of one's writing.'

Sharma believes that the content of publications run or controlled by women also tends to reflect the broader outlook of their female editors. Thanks to their coverage of a range of issues and the 'good mix' of serious and light stories they offer to readers, they are able to cater to a wider audience, she says. According to her, the Mumbai edition of *The Times of India, The Sunday Times of India, The Sunday Observer* in Mumbai and the Sunday magazine of *The Hindu* are cases in point. However, she thinks the trend also has its downside, especially in a daily newspaper, which can become too 'featurish' and lifestyle-oriented at the cost of hardcore political coverage—especially of state, district and local politics.

Anjali Mathur, resident editor, *The Sunday Observer*, Mumbai, also thinks that the number of women in the profession today has had an impact on the press: 'The scope of mainstream journalism has widened. For one, issues like health, the environment, and so on, have now become part of mainstream journalism, thanks largely to women in the field. Also, women's tendency to look at the human side of a story even while covering hard news has now become the accepted mode for reporting.'

Parvathi Menon, too, believes that 'women in journalism (not necessarily "women's journalism") have brought great changes into journalism, in terms of democratizing both the workplace and professional practice.'

Others are not so sure. As Delhi-based columnist and author Sevanti Ninan points out, 'Some women have shaped the portrayal of women and coverage of women's issues in the media. But, otherwise, women are not doing anything different. For example, we haven't seen much change in the type and style of political reporting done by women.'

According to Philipose, 'Women journalists have produced some great journalism but as a category they have not made a qualitative difference. If women do produce a different brand of journalism, it's still journalism in the making here.' Delhi-based veteran journalist Kamla Mankekar agrees that women are not yet shaping media messages but believes that 'whatever has been done has been done by women.'

Anklesaria Aiyar suggests that if women have not yet had a major impact on the media it is because 'they are still afraid of being unpopular with peer groups and even readers.' Similarly, as Bela Thaker, sub-editor, *Gujarat Samachar*, Ahmedabad, points out, it is hardly surprising that women have not yet had much impact on content since only a few occupy decision-making positions within the press.

According to S Urmila Majumdar, senior sub-editor, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, the fact that women's pages in Bengali papers still focus more on models and face-packs than on issues 'shows who runs the business.' Similarly, Koppikar points out that while the quantum of coverage, in terms of the number of column centimetres devoted to women in newspapers, may have registered an exponential increase, it is important to examine the nature of the coverage before hailing this as an unmixed blessing.

Commenting on the situation, Rai says, 'It is sad that although women are doing well for themselves in journalism today this has not provided any benefits for the larger body of women. In fact, the spaces once available for coverage of women's issues are disappearing, with newspapers dropping the few development and gender pages that once existed. Women are not always in a position to shape media messages but most of those who could help make a difference seem to have voluntarily missed the opportunity.'

End-notes

Behind the widespread antipathy to the term, 'woman journalist', seems to lie the assumption that identification by gender is a put-down rather than an additional—arguably unimportant and often unnecessary—detail. To a large number of women in journalism today, the female gender appears to connote inferiority. Although many women in the field have excelled in their work and been publicly recognized for it, most still seem to feel the need to emphasize the fact that they are not 'just' women.

At the same time, many of them—including some who dislike classification by gender—suggest that women possess certain inherent qualities that enhance their contribution to the press. And, as discussed later in the book, the majority of them also admit that women face special, gender-linked problems within the profession.

Playing devil's advocate, I would like to suggest that, in fact, some characteristics and contributions attributed to women may be influenced by factors other than gender per se.

Take, for instance, the generalized assumption that women in the profession are exceptionally conscientious and hardworking.

If this is indeed true, it could be because, as many have pointed out, as a group they are still under pressure to prove themselves. Similarly, if they are at present less susceptible to corruption of various kinds than their male counterparts, this could conceivably be due, at least partly, to their social and economic background, if not lack of opportunity.

Likewise, the expansion in the scope of press coverage since the mid-1970s was clearly influenced by events and processes within the country, such as the experience of Internal Emergency, and the growth of popular movements for women's emancipation, human rights, environmental protection, and so on, both nationally and internationally. These developments stimulated both public concern and media interest in these issues. The mid-70s also happened to be the period during which women began to enter the press in significant numbers. Many of them were, naturally, conscientised by their times and brought their concerns into their work, as did several men.

The controversy over perspective, too, may have to do with the fact that gender is not necessarily the deciding factor. While most women are likely to have similar reactions to certain issues—such as violence against women—their analysis of these and their views on other gender-related issues surely depend more on their exposure to information and ideas, the overall ideology to which they subscribe (if any), and so on, than the mere fact that they are female.

Similarly, if many mediawomen react negatively to the notion that they must do their bit for womankind through their profession, it is probably because the supposition is based on the questionable premise that all women have similar views on events and issues. Such an expectation may have been encouraged by the fact that many in the third wave of women coming into the profession happened to be influenced by feminism and the nascent women's movement here, and did take on this responsibility.

However, the assumption is naturally resisted by mediawomen who came into the field at the same time but had no strong convictions about the role of gender or, indeed, the media in society. Women of the earlier and subsequent generations seem to be less self-conscious and sensitive about this matter, perhaps because they were and are not under external pressure to stand up and be counted as defenders of women's rights.

Although it may be premature to conclude that the increased presence of women in the profession has democratized—if not feminized—the media, there is little doubt that they have made a perceptible mark on the media and irreversibly altered the atmosphere in most newsrooms. Only time will tell whether this will translate into a transformation of media content and systems.

This is obviously the case across the world. As Ginny Dougary says, 'While I do not believe that there is a single "women's point of view" or a unique "feminine sensibility" ... what is clear is that in the areas of the media where women do have an input they can make a difference. It will take several generations of equal numbers of women and men in senior positions in these industries (as in others) to gauge more precisely what difference gender can make to the product, as well as to the working environment.'[2]

Similarly, Margaret Gallagher acknowledges that the overarching assumption that the presence of more women in the media—particularly in creative and decision-making positions—should introduce new perspectives and interpretations within media output remains to be proven. However, she says, 'There is some reason to believe—or at least to hope—that a "critical mass" of women will have some success in changing the long-established media practices, routines and priorities which individual female professionals have been powerless to shift.'[3]

Clearly, there are as many opinions on these matters as there are journalists. What is remarkable, however, is the fact that almost everyone everywhere acknowledges some common characteristics that women, as a whole, bring to their jobs in journalism. And that the self-image of Indian women in the profession is, for the most part, extremely positive.

3

The Gender (Dis)Advantage

There are no advantages to being a woman in this profession. There are only disadvantages. Never once have I been treated better because I am a woman. Nobody gives a damn.

Seema Mustafa

This may seem like a bit of an exaggeration but, if Mustafa overstates the case somewhat, it is understandable in the light of some of her experiences in the profession—from discrimination and exploitation at the entry point to violence in the line of duty.

The notion that gender would act as a protective shield for women in the profession, against targetted violence at least, may have had some basis in reality at one time. But too many female journalists have been attacked by agents of both the state and various militant organizations in the recent past for this naive assumption to hold good any more.

Mustafa, now political editor, *The Asian Age*, New Delhi, is far from a shrinking violet and not one to ask for special favours on account of gender. She arranged to be smuggled into Beirut so that she could report on the conflict there and braved death threats to continue reporting from Punjab at the height of the troubles in the state. She was one of the last journalists to go into Amritsar before the government launched Operation Bluestar, the storming of the Golden Temple by military forces.

But even she was unnerved by the treatment she and two colleagues, together with their driver, received at the hands of the Punjab police in the early 1980s. They had gone to the border areas of Punjab and Haryana to speak to local people about the controversial, religion-based census then being undertaken there. The police tried to stop them from entering Kandu Khera, a border village. She questioned their right to stop them from doing their legitimate work. A high-ranking police official on the spot signalled to his subordinates, who obeyed by attacking the journalists and their driver. All of them, including Mustafa, were beaten with rifle butts and the photographer's camera was smashed. Then they were all bundled into a van and taken to a distant, isolated place, where they were made to stand in the sun all day.

According to Mustafa, officers of the central government's Ministry of Home Affairs, who were present, did not say a word or do a thing to prevent such misbehaviour by members of the law-enforcing agency. What is more, the police put out a story that Mustafa and her colleagues had gone back to Delhi, possibly for the benefit of the many political personages as well as other journalists touring the area, who may have noticed their absence. Fortunately, Ritu Sarin, another newswoman who was in the neighbourhood and knew that they had gone into Kandu Khera, managed to get at the truth and secure their release before nightfall.

Says Mustafa, 'They must have been waiting to see whether or not there would be a hue and cry before deciding what to do with us.' She does not think it is entirely inconceivable that they might have been killed if no one had made an immediate and special effort to trace them. 'I have had lots of trouble with the state,' says Mustafa, 'but this was the worst instance.'

Violent Attacks

An alarming number of women mediapersons have been murdered in New Delhi in the past couple of years: Shivani Jajodia (of New Delhi Television), Monica Malik (Zee TV), Sudha Gupta (Akashvani/All India Radio) and Shivani Bhatnagar (*The Indian Express*). It is not known whether their violent deaths had anything to do with their work. However, in the case of Bhatnagar, who was a principal correspondent of the *Express* and a member of its Special Investigation Team, there is serious speculation within the profession about the possibility that her murder may have had something to do with her work as an investigative journalist.

On the other hand, there is little doubt that two violent incidents involving women journalists which were covered by the national press not long ago were linked to their professional work. In December 1997, Delhi-based freelance photojournalist Sarvesh was manhandled by a policeman, a doctor and a warder after she had taken photographs at the Ranchi Mansik Arogyashala (a mental health hospital) in Bihar. According to the First Information Report (FIR) she filed at the local police station and her complaint to the Press Council of India, she was threatened and dragged along the road, her dupatta was torn and her camera was damaged—all for taking pictures of the outside of the hospital.

In January 1998, Suparna Sharma, correspondent, *The Indian Express*, Guwahati, and her journalist husband were both attacked by members of the Assam police force while engaging an autorickshaw to take them home after an evening get-together at the residence of a fellow journalist. Unfortunately for them, they happened to be on a street where there had been an attempt on the life of the Inspector-General of Police some hours earlier. They had barely got into the auto when they were stopped by three policemen, dragged out of the vehicle and subjected to severe, unprovoked violence. Neither their press cards nor her gender were of any help as the deputy superintendent of police, his two subordinates and a driver pummelled and kicked them all over their bodies.

According to Sharma, they were then taken to the police station and kept there till 4.30 a.m. without being allowed to make a single telephone call. Not only was she illegally detained and kept overnight in a police station without the possibly mitigatory presence of a female officer, but she was also refused a medical examination on the grounds that they could not call in a lady doctor at that time of the night (her husband, on the other hand, was medically examined). It was close to dawn when they were finally permitted to make their first telephone call. Although a magisterial inquiry subsequently indicted the policemen concerned, no action had been taken against them when I spoke to her in September 1998. Her own complaint to the state's Crimes Against Women cell was also still pending nine months after the incident.

In December 1992, Ruchira Gupta, Delhi-based television and print journalist, was attacked by Hindu militants involved in the infamous demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya when she went into the mosque to investigate the process of destruction. She thinks she may have been mistaken for a Muslim because she was wearing a scarf around her head. In any case, she says, she was nearly strangled before being dragged out to a trench. She was eventually rescued by a *'kar sevak'* (a volunteer involved in the demolition) who recognized her as a journalist.

According to her, after going public with what she had witnessed during and after the demolition (when she happened to be with leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the political party associated with the organizations responsible for the destruction of the mosque), her car was vandalized and she received threatening letters and anonymous phone calls.

Radhika Ramaseshan, special correspondent, *The Pioneer*, New Delhi, who also covered the demolition, reports a similar attack on another female journalist, Suman Gupta, who represented *Jan Morcha*, one of the few local papers with a secular outlook. She was apparently picked up, roughed up, thrown into a pit and taken for dead until some *'kar sevaks'* informed her parents about the incident.

On New Year's Day 1992, Rupa Chinai, now special correspondent—health, *The Times of India*, Mumbai, was walking down a street in Tezpur, Assam, during a bandh (a form of political protest involving the stoppage of all public activity) when she saw policemen trying to force open a shop. She was about to take a photograph when a policeman rushed up, grabbed the camera and dragged her down the street by its strap. Instead of reprimanding his subordinate for his misbehaviour, the supervising officer proceeded to subject her to verbal abuse.

In 1991 Manimala suffered a broken jaw after being beaten up in Mumbai, allegedly by members of the Shiv Sena (though the involvement of his men was later denied by Bal Thackeray, leader of the militant outfit turned political party). She was attacked when she went to the rescue of a male colleague who was being assaulted by the goons.

Photojournalist Savita Kirloskar, now with the Reuters news agency in Mumbai, was locked up and threatened within two days of joining the profession in December 1989. She was then working on a crime story about the shady goings-on in a local school for the tabloid paper, *Mid-Day*. More recently, during the caste riots in Mumbai following the desecration of a statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar, she got pinched by rioters, while two other female journalists on a motorcycle were harassed.

Tanushree Gangopadhyay, correspondent, *Deccan Herald*, Ahmedabad, reports that another female photojournalist, Nasira Sheikh, was recently beaten up in a small town in southern Gujarat, along with a male reporter. This was ostensibly done in retribution for the publication of a photograph she had taken of a minister's wife with some local 'mafia dons'.

Renuka Puri, staff photographer, *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, was subjected to both verbal and physical abuse at the residence of a politician in the capital. According to her, while both the politician and his female colleague shouted at her, the former hit her camera and members of his party pulled at her dupatta.

It is a known fact that photographers are more vulnerable to attack than 'scribes', partly because their equipment makes them more conspicuous and partly because, as Kirloskar puts it, people caught in compromising situations get 'irrationally angry' if they are photographed. However, it is significant that female photojournalists seem to enjoy no special protection on account of either gender or rarity.

Teesta Setalvad, co-founder/editor, *Communalism Combat*, Mumbai, covered the pogrom against Muslims in Mumbai in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Masjid for *Business India*. According to her, 'While reporting on earlier riots I always felt I enjoyed some immunity, as a woman and as a journalist. But during the 1992-93 Mumbai riots there was no such immunity. Journalists from the English and the Urdu press were specially singled out for attack, irrespective of their profession and their gender.'

Kirloskar suggests that the average rioter has become more media-savvy and camera-conscious with the increase in spot news coverage on television over the past few years. But, she says, he has also turned more dangerous and can be as violent with a woman as with a man. In fact, she thinks female photographers are actually more vulnerable because their rarity makes them particularly conspicuous.

Meena Menon points out that in some parts of the country, like the border towns of Uttar Pradesh, there is total contempt for journalists in certain sections of society: 'While the people are on the whole nice, the police and the authorities can be quite nasty. The fact that you are a woman makes no difference to them.'

However, the threat of violence directed specifically at them as journalists is not a major issue for the majority of women in the profession. In fact, many say they feel quite secure wherever they are in the country. Most seem to believe that even their inherent vulnerability to sexual violence, as women, is offset by the protection afforded by their status as mediapersons—especially if they represent well-known publications—and, to some extent, by the socio-economic class to which journalists tend to belong (more on this later).

Still, while few would fully concur with Mustafa's strong statement, when the advantages and disadvantages are finally totted up, it does seem as if most female journalists think there are more problems than privileges attached to being a woman in this profession.

Some Advantages

On the positive side, many see gender as an advantage in the field, if only or at least partly because of preconceived notions about women and feminine qualities. For instance, they point out, women often have better access to sources of news and information. They hasten to add that, contrary to what many men in the profession like to believe, this access has little to do with 'feminine charms and wiles'.

Instead, they say, their greater access is partly due to the fact that they are more likely to be remembered and recognized, thanks to their relative rarity—everywhere until recently and even now in some parts of the country and sections of the press. In addition, traditional attitudes sometimes work in their favour. For one, they find it easier to gain access and talk to fellow women than do male colleagues, especially (but not only) in places where social interaction between the sexes is limited.

Many women say they are also less likely than their male counterparts to be evicted from places where journalists are not particularly welcome. As Neerja Chowdhury puts it, 'A woman journalist can walk into a collector's office or home, confront him and not risk getting thrown out.' Similarly, male sources often find it difficult to fob off a female professional seeking an appointment. 'It is less easy for them to turn me down,' says Sushila Ravindranath.

But, more significantly, most women believe they enjoy better access because they are generally regarded as less threatening, more trustworthy and more sensitive. While the association of such characteristics with one gender may seem stereotypical, if not illusory, there seems to be no getting away from the reality of social conditioning, which makes certain traits more prevalent among members of one gender than the other. As Vaasanthi, editor, *India Today* (Tamil), Chennai, puts it, 'Sensitivity is certainly not exclusive to women but, on an average, more women than men seem to be sensitive.'

According to Mumbai-based freelance journalist Amrita Shah, women are usually good listeners and this clearly works to their advantage, especially during interviews. Jayshree Desai, special correspondent, *Chitralekha* (Marathi), Mumbai, believes that women's tendency to be patient, persuasive, perceptive and sensitive helps them establish a good rapport with sources. Not only do women talk more freely to other women, as Swati Mahalank, sub-editor, *Sakal*, Pune, points out, but men also tend to open up to women. This is how Shobhaa Dé puts it: 'Women are seen as "reservoirs of empathy." This makes men, especially, less guarded and more open.'

Even Tavleen Singh, who does not readily acknowledge gender as a significant factor in professional life, admits: 'Women are less likely to get thrown out. Their minds are better for interviews and for seeing the human side of stories. Politicians are also inclined to be less guarded with women; they open up more easily and sometimes say things which they may not say to a man.'

Often the trust reposed in them is based on the fond but false notion that women in the profession are likely to be less hard-nosed than their male counterparts. As Shabnam Minwala says, 'Women are perceived as non-threatening and empathetic, especially by men, even when their questions are ferocious and the information they seek can clearly be damaging.' Freelance journalist Ranjana Sengupta agrees: 'If you are a middle class woman in India, sources don't see you as a threat. They assume that you will be an unquestioning conduit.'

Promilla Kalhan describes how the attitude of a senior healthcare official she had met for a story on a public hospital changed dramatically after the publication of the piece, which exposed the appalling conditions in the institution: 'He was really angry, all the more because he had expected a soft story.'

Sucheta Dalal, financial editor, *The Times of India*, Mumbai, highlights another quality she has noticed in women which she believes works in their favour in the profession. According to her, 'Women are on the whole more willing to learn. Many men don't want to acknowledge that they don't know something. They prefer to act smart and bluff their way through. Even the juniors among them prefer to talk only to the chairmen and managing directors of companies. My best stories came from second and third level people in organizations. I also had no problems saying I didn't understand something. I have found that, if you have that attitude, people are extremely willing to help by explaining things and filling you in on background.'

Gouri Chatterjee, deputy editor (features), *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, makes yet another point when she suggests that many women in the profession are privileged in that they have more options than their male counterparts. She cites the example of the way she left her previous job, as news editor of the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, when the working environment became too unpleasant for her to handle. She is not sure how many men would have had the freedom to react as she did (more on her experience later). A number of other journalists agree that, under the present circumstances, more women than men have the luxury of choosing not to compromise even if it means risking their jobs.

Bachi Karkaria is upbeat about the prospects for women in the profession. 'Women may have to try harder initially,' she says, 'but that doesn't really hurt them because it ultimately makes them better professionals. Now, with so many women in the field, the old stereotypes and chauvinistic or patronising attitudes are no longer so prevalent. Because the change has come about through evolution rather than revolution it is more stable and enduring.'

Not everyone is so optimistic. In fact, the litany of woes is too long and too real to warrant such hopefulness except, perhaps and to some extent, in cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore. Women talk about a wide range of problematic issues which remain unresolved in the press even today. The more general of these are highlighted in the rest of this chapter.

Specific problems related to recruitment, remuneration, assignments and promotions, which women in the profession still encounter, are discussed in subsequent chapters. A number of other problems identified by many women also call for separate discussion: the perennial issue of work and family, the recurring question of women and night work, and the persistence of negative attitudes towards women within the profession. These as well as the influence of societal factors on women's experiences in the field are also discussed in more detail in the chapters that follow.

Pressure to Perform

According to Tavleen Singh, if women in the profession experience any disadvantages at all, they are themselves largely to blame because they ask for special treatment, beg off night duty, and so on. However, the majority of women in the field disagree with this assessment and claim that most of the obstacles they face have to do with social attitudes towards women in general and women in this profession in particular.

For instance, a number of journalists highlight the greater pressure on women to prove themselves. As Shubhada Chaukar, sub-editor, *Loksatta*, Mumbai, puts it, 'Women have to be extra capable, not just equal.' They also talk of having to put in double or even triple the amount of work to be accepted on a par with male contemporaries. According to Sanchita Das, principal correspondent, *Business India*, Chennai, 'Women tend to put far more effort into their work, probably because they fear invisible prejudice and sense that they are constantly being assessed.'

Mustafa agrees: 'You need to put in much more work to be considered equal. You have to make sure that nobody can say you dodge your duties.' According to Parvathy Devi R, there is no doubt that women have to make twice as much effort and walk that extra mile to prove that they are as capable as any man, if not better. As Desai states matter-of-factly, 'Women have to work harder and they do'.

Women sometimes bend over backwards in their efforts to prove that they are at least as good as the next man, if not better. 'I was continually trying to prove myself,' says Rajashri Dasgupta, themes editor, *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, about her initial years in the profession. 'I worked all nine months of my first pregnancy and did night shifts right up to the seventh month. I didn't want them to think I couldn't handle it.'

According to Sandhya Taksale, 'I think ten times before I take leave for family or household reasons. I admit it's a self-imposed restriction. But I don't want to provide any opportunity for anyone to comment on my commitment to work.' Chennai-based freelance journalist S. Subha says she used to stay late at the *Ananda Viketan* office where she worked earlier, whether or not she had anything urgent to do—just to demonstrate that she expected no concessions.

In some cases, the pressure to perform is accentuated by the novelty factor. 'When I moved to Chennai, the very concept of business journalism and magazines like *BI* were new here,' points out Sushila Ravindranath. 'My being a woman was just an added dimension to the overall strangeness of the phenomenon. In addition, there was the small town mentality to deal with: people wanting to place you, to know exactly who you are and what you are about. I could also sense an undercurrent of questioning: "Can she really do it?" I had to prove that I was equal to the task.'

Several women mention the continual, uncomfortable feeling that they are perpetually being watched and evaluated. 'The spotlight is constantly on you: anything you do, any move you make, gets noticed and discussed,' says Rasheeda Bhagat, deputy editor, *Business Line*, Chennai. 'Any mistake made by a woman in the profession spreads like wildfire,' alleges Manjiri Damle, correspondent, *Pune Times*, Pune. 'You are an easy target.' Mustafa agrees: 'Any mistake you make is talked about. Men make mistakes, too, but that seems somehow different.' As Lata Raje, assistant editor, *Loksatta*, Mumbai, puts it, 'When a woman makes a mistake she faces double criticism: for the mistake itself and for being a woman making it.'

In this respect, gender seems to take precedence over professional status. Even a proprietor-editor like Malini Parthasarathy, executive editor, *The Hindu*, Chennai, admits that women do need to try harder. 'I really felt I had to prove myself when I started out as a correspondent in Delhi, both with news sources and with colleagues,' she says, although she is otherwise loath to concede that gender can influence professional life.

Patronising Attitudes

Many women claim that it is often difficult to establish professional relationships with sources of news and information. One recurring complaint, particularly from younger women, is about the patronising attitudes they encounter. Quite a few say they are tired of being asked the customary, clichéd question: What's a nice girl like you doing in a place/profession like this?

As Menon says, 'The combination of youth and gender does invite condescension. Young men don't have to prove themselves as much. As a woman you're not expected to be interested in subjects like forestry and dams, for example. You have to demonstrate to sources that you are not only serious but know your facts. Ultimately they do give you the information but it's annoying to have to prove your credentials time and again just because you are a woman.' At the same time, she says, some sources do respect the fact that you are a journalist.

'As a young, seemingly convent-educated woman covering politics, it is presumed that you don't know anything about matters like the sugar lobby in Maharashtra,' says Smruti Koppikar. 'Whatever work you have done earlier is dismissed with a *"dekhna padega"* (let's see). I don't know whether it is youth, class, gender or the fact that you represent the English press that brings on this attitude, but it can limit the range of sources you can cultivate, especially in politics.'

K.S. Lata, resident editor, *The Economic Times*, Chennai, had an embarrassing experience at an early stage in her career. During an appointment with an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer heading a public sector corporation in Bangalore, she was taken aback when he called his secretary in and asked her: 'Would you have had the guts to meet an IAS officer when you were her age?' In hardcore business reporting, she says, news sources—usually either industrialists or government officials—tend to be extremely patronising.

Puri talks about a similar experience with an army officer, which she found irritating. He refused to have his photograph taken by a male colleague but agreed to pose for her, saying, 'I can't refuse a pretty face!'

Female press photographers seem to be specially vulnerable to unwanted and unwarranted allusions to their gender. Two who cover sports were quoted by Sameera Khan, junior assistant editor, *The Times of India*, Mumbai, in a recent article.[1] One was asked by a former captain of the national and Mumbai cricket teams: 'Why are there so many female photographers in your paper? Is it for easy access?' The other told Khan: 'I was getting my camera out for a cricket match I was covering in Bangalore when an official-looking man came up to me and said, "Madam, this area is for the press, not for fans."'

According to Julian D'Costa, reporter/sub-editor, *The Herald*, Panaji, 'When you go to a government department for some information the people there look at you twice and seem to doubt that you are really a journalist. They try to fob you off unless you are looking for information on a "soft" subject.'

Local culture seems to play a significant part in determining how sources react to women in the press. According to Shikha Mukherjee, it took a while for sources in Calcutta to take her seriously. However, she thinks their initial hesitation may have had as much to do with her other 'drawbacks' as with her gender: 'I didn't speak or read Bengali very well and didn't fit into the typical image of a Bengali woman.' Nevertheless, she points out, 'They knuckled down very fast.'

Shona Bagai, reporter, *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, also thinks image counts. She believes that it is 'partly because I don't wear a sari and don't look the part of a typical middle class Bengali woman' that sources tend to treat her like a child and not take her seriously. To the question of whether youth rather than gender could be the operating factor here, she has a ready answer: 'Young men don't face this problem. The way you look and dress is more significant for a woman.'

According to her, male sources seem to be particularly hesitant about accepting her as a journalist. For example, she was at the airport one night to interview pilgrims returning from Mecca after a disaster there in which several people had died. Instead of answering her questions, she says, the men she spoke to kept asking her why she was out so late, whether she was married, and so on. 'The women didn't ask me all that,' she points out.

Usha Ram Manohar, sub-editor, Press Trust of India, Kochi, says organizers of events sometimes feel insulted if a woman rather than a man is sent to cover a function. She cites the example of a politically significant press conference she had covered for her news agency in Kochi, where a prominent politician known for his customary discretion spoke against his rival in the state for the first time. 'Later the organizers called the office to ask why I had been sent. They obviously thought that such an important press conference should have been covered by a man.' In any case, she says, 'Most people who come into the PTI office assume that, as the only woman there, I must be the teleprinter operator.'

Similar belittling attitudes obviously exist elsewhere, too. At a recent conference on Women in the Media held in Pune, women working as journalists in small towns in Maharashtra spoke of the humiliating treatment they encounter in the course of their work. According to Desai, they reported that they are sometimes not even given chairs to sit on during press conferences! So it is not surprising that they are seldom informed about press tours.

This is reminiscent of the experiences of women who joined the profession in the early days. For example, while covering a foreign tour of former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Kalhan found that she was kept out of a press conference in Egypt and an official luncheon in Germany just because she was a woman.[2] Similarly, in a 1982 article Zinat Imam, formerly with *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, wrote of how she was not granted an interview by the then Pakistani president, Zia-ul-Haq, merely because she was a woman.[3]

Sexual Politics

Politicians, bureaucrats and police officers generally have three ways of dealing with women in the profession, says Mustafa: 'They patronize you or push you around or lech at you.' According to her, 'You have to cultivate a veneer to deal with men and earn their respect so that you don't get pushed around. The first five minutes of interaction are crucial.' As a young reporter covering crime, she says, she found it effective to present an angry and belligerent facade to deal with the leering she encountered in police stations.

Many women talk about the sexual banter they often have to put up with in the line of duty. Women today may not have to deal with the kind of experience Kalhan faced in the early days, when the personal assistant to a minister sniggered and made offensive insinuations when she called to ask for an appointment.

However, sexual innuendo is obviously still par for the course. 'One would have thought women in the profession would be immune to passes by now,' says Gouri Agtey Athale, special correspondent, *The Financial Express*, Pune. 'But you still receive unnecessary compliments about your clothes and comments on how you look. And, every now and then, the topic of sex somehow creeps into the middle of an interview.' Delhi-based freelance journalist Annu Anand confirms this with the example of a senior police officer she was interviewing about a new all-woman control room. According to her, the gratuitous remarks he made about the policewomen's sexual frustrations—ostensibly on account of their long working hours—were clearly meant to discomfit her.

Similarly, Mumbai-based freelance journalist Jyoti Punwani mentions her experience of interviewing a well-known art collector for an article on an extraordinarily expensive new edition of the *Kama Sutra*. He used a certain four-letter word repeatedly and quite unnecessarily throughout the interview. Later, under the guise of ensuring accuracy in his quotations, he asked her to read them out on the phone, getting her to repeat the lines in which his favourite word appeared.

Apart from having to deal with such cheap tricks, women find they often have to endure unsolicited flirtation. 'There is always a little game that high-profile men, particularly, seem to feel they must play with women,' says Shobhaa Dé. 'There seems to be a spontaneous response among men, across the board, to play up that aspect of human relations. You have to deal with this flirtatious fluff at least initially. The first fifteen minutes of a meeting are wasted on this predictable pattern of behaviour.'

Kalpana Sharma believes this trend is more prevalent in cities than elsewhere. According to her, 'Sources often get personal and ask irrelevant questions. You have to be firm but it's difficult to gauge how tough to get because you do want your information. You face a dilemma about whether or not to play along for the sake of the story. You have to make a conscious choice.' Having had such experiences when she was young, she says, she deliberately opted to be underdressed and wear plain, severe clothes to work so as not to attract attention to herself as a woman.

Sharma also believes people in the corporate world and the bureaucracy are more prone to such behaviour. 'They take advantage of the fact that they belong to the same class and have at least as much power and credibility as you have. Since their approach is very subtle, you can't really challenge them. It's often difficult to decide whether or not to make a fuss.'

Khan quotes a business journalist on her initial difficulties in this regard: 'My sources—mostly middle-aged executives—would either be too formal with me, while being quite friendly with my male colleagues, or they would call up a little too often and make suggestive propositions.'[4]

Many journalists point out that, contrary to expectations, politicians are far less likely than others to adopt such offensive behaviour towards women in the profession. According to Singh, 'Most of the politicians we meet are too vulnerable themselves to make passes at journalists.' Mustafa adds, 'Politicians are at least more open. If people lech openly you can deal with it—you can even slap them. But most of the time they don't dare.' However, Sudha G Tilak, special correspondent, *The Telegraph*, Chennai, says she has had to deal with sexual harassment by certain politicians in Tamil Nadu.

The film world is another place widely presumed to harbour men prone to making passes. Bharati Pradhan has been dealing with film stars since she began her career as a journalist while still in college. According to her, while passes are not unheard of, they are not as common as they are believed to be. Nevertheless, when she first encountered such behaviour, she was shattered: 'When you are young you wonder whether you did anything to make it happen. I used to behave with the film crowd as I did with my college friends, not realizing that they were adults, unlike my peers.' But, she says, 'I learnt very fast and by the time I was twenty–twenty-one I knew how to look after myself.'

According to Anita Rao Kashi, harassment is not always at the relatively mild level of sexual banter or subtle propositions. Although she has not personally faced such problems, she says several of her colleagues have had seriously unpleasant experiences with male sources, including government officials.

Gloria Suhasini, editorial associate—Business Publications Division, *The Indian Express* (Mumbai) Group, Chennai, points out that many women journalists do not talk about the harassment they face lest they be considered 'uncool'. But, she says, it is a fact that they have to put up a brave front with sources who deliberately fix evening appointments with them, drink into the night and even ask them for dates.

Swati Bhattacharjee sums up the situation when she says, 'It is more difficult for a woman to get accepted by sources. Many men are not used to dealing with women professionals, at least in Calcutta. Most of them seem to know only two ways of relating to you: treating you as a younger sister and acting elder-brotherly or avuncular, or trying to be overfriendly, with unnecessary jokes, etc. However irritating this may be, you have to play along because you can't afford to alienate the person you are interviewing. There's always that slight discomfort about where exactly you stand. On the one hand, you want to cultivate your sources, which means having some kind of a serious, long-term relationship; on the other hand, you don't want to be misconstrued.'

However, on a happier note, Desai in Mumbai and Seema Deshpande, reporter, *Loksatta*, Pune, say they have found many sources extremely understanding about their constraints as women in the profession. According to Deshpande, when her child was young, people were very cooperative if she took her baby along or asked them to meet her in her home for interviews. Similarly, while covering elections, Desai found that politicians were quite willing to talk to her on the phone because they knew it would be difficult for her to meet them in hotels or even in other places far from her residence late at night, the only time when they were free for interviews.

Glass-mates

Many women point out that they face another disadvantage in cultivating sources, especially in the world of politics, where most important contacts are, still, men. According to them, it is difficult for women to develop the kind of easy, informal relationships with these men that their male colleagues can. Quite a few mention as a handicap the fact that they are not in a position to hang around with them late into the night—eating, drinking and sharing confidences. However, almost all of them also point out that such fraternising does not necessarily result in worthwhile stories and, further, that cosy relationships with 'glass-mates'—to borrow the term used by a young journalist in Kottayam—can actually obstruct journalistic work.

The ones who seem to feel this disadvantage the most are the young women in the field. According to Vineetha Gopi, 'Sometimes I do feel gender is a disadvantage in this profession. Most news sources are men. They tend to be more friendly with male journalists and meet them informally in bars and restaurants. Of course, we do get the main, formal news, but men are able to get something extra. Even at formal functions, men stay back to chat after the main business is over whereas women can't just hang around once the formal meeting has ended. It is also difficult to maintain regular contact with male news sources because it is awkward to make daily phone calls to them. The only time we are at an advantage is when an occasional woman comes into the office with a story—they tend to seek out another woman.'

Kashi agrees that it is frustrating not to be able to have informal chats with news sources over coffee, tea or a drink. According to her, most government officers and politicians would feel awkward meeting a female journalist anywhere except in their offices or other official spaces. Yet, she says, many male colleagues confide that it is precisely during casual chats in informal surroundings that they get to know a lot of what is going on behind the scenes.

'Some beats, like customs and excise, have formal and informal channels of information,' points out Priyanka Kakodkar. 'In such cases it does help to be on buddy-buddy terms with people in those organizations. It's difficult for women to establish such relationships with sources.'

Even more experienced journalists believe women's inability to fraternize with sources can be a disadvantage. According to Athale, 'You can get the basic information but not the extra little details that make a difference. If you do try to cultivate sources you are faced with insinuations. People ask, "Who is that guy you chatted up?"'

Calcutta-based freelance journalist Annam Suresh makes a similar point. 'It's more difficult for women to ferret out information, especially from lower level staff in government offices,' she says. 'Male reporters can more easily take a peon into a corner and find out things. Women have to put in a lot more effort to get the information they need.'

'You can't always get news out of politicians and bureaucrats across the table,' points out Sajeda Momin. 'As a woman you can't get much closer to them and so they can't whisper in your ear. Sometimes that kind of proximity does make a difference in terms of whether you get a scoop or not. But, of course, it can also work the other way.'

Amrita Shah agrees: 'The process of politics doesn't always come through in a formal interview. As a woman you can't always establish a casual, friendly camaraderie with sources and this makes it difficult for you to find out about backroom political manoeuvres. At the same time, being too friendly and buddy-buddy with politicians can inhibit you as a journalist.'

Jyoti Shukla also admits that not being able to socialize with sources and work at an informal level can be a disadvantage. But, she says, it is not necessarily good for journalists to be on close terms with politicians. Similarly, Navata admits that men gain access to information about inner dealings and changes in political parties because they spend time drinking and smoking with politicians. But she points out that such relationships also lead to self-interest and bias, which tempt some journalists to play with and even distort facts to suit their cronies and themselves.

Gayatri, reporter, *The Indian Express*, Hyderabad, makes an interesting point about the advantages of not having special relationships with sources. According to her, 'Many male journalists in the Telugu press seem to develop intimate relationships with news sources belonging to their caste or region. Men also tend to ingratiate themselves and establish personal equations with sources. This affects their capacity to be critical or even to ask pointed questions at press conferences. Women don't seem to have such strong caste or regional affiliations. They tend to be more professional in their approach.'

Koppikar makes a distinction between sources in business and politics in this respect. According to her, 'With people in the business world, even if you meet in the evening, over a drink and dinner, there is a certain, accepted code of conduct which allows you to maintain a professional relationship. It is more difficult to meet politicians at night—there is a degree beyond which you can't afford to get informal.'

A number of women point out that hanging around and cosying up to sources is neither desirable nor necessary. As Damle says, 'It all boils down to creating confidence in sources through consistent and accurate coverage. People then call and give you leads.'

Many senior journalists agree. 'I don't believe you need to be on buddy-buddy terms with sources to do your job well,' says Singh. According to Mustafa, 'Attending official dinners and drinking with politicians don't necessarily help you get news. In fact, too much camaraderie can go against professionalism. It is better to work hard and build up credibility. As long as your facts are correct, sources keep meeting you and giving you information—even if you write against them.'

Arundhati Mukherjee, special correspondent, *Aaj Kaal*, Calcutta, concurs. 'I don't smoke or drink or go to late-night parties but I am close to politicians,' she says. 'I can pick up the phone and talk to the chief minister whenever I need to. I get exclusive stories on the basis of my contacts. You have to earn the confidence of the person. They need to know that you respect off-the-record statements, quote accurately and don't distort facts. Once you establish that, there is no problem.'

Nupur Basu dismisses the stories that come out of the much-vaunted late night sessions to which male journalists have access as 'non-stories', almost entirely comprising worthless gossip and speculation. 'We women are more focussed,' she says. 'Our relationship with sources is more professional. We know what we want and get the information we are after on our own terms, in our own time.' According to her, sources also know what is what and politicians, in particular, often make fun of journalists known to be unprofessionally close to certain public figures. Rarely are women in the profession referred to with such disrespect, she points out.

Olga Tellis, resident editor, *The Observer of Business & Politics*, Mumbai, agrees. 'I haven't seen better stories originating from those who fraternize with, and are close to, politicians,' she says. 'In fact, they compromise their position as journalists and can't write about what they know. If you are committed to your work, people are forthcoming with information.'

'If you are seen as a serious journalist, stories come to you,' confirms Sujata Anandan, special correspondent, *The Indian Express*, Mumbai. 'The best stories I have broken have come from politicians who have called me with leads, because of my own reputation as well as that of the paper.' She points out that fraternizing usually leads to favours both ways. Teesta Setalvad concurs: 'Often, senior journalists with excellent access and knowledge seem to indulge in self-censorship. The advantage they have in terms of insider status is not reflected in their stories.'

Devyani Bhardwaj suggests that this is true even of film reviewers. She points out that male colleagues who are very close to film distributors or cinema hall owners often cannot write honest reviews. 'I have not found it a problem to maintain just the right degree of contact,' she says.

Parvathi Menon sums up the situation when she says, 'It's true that most men are more comfortable talking to male journalists and most women to women journalists. But that pattern is breaking down rapidly as more women join the profession. I believe that if you are serious and persistent you soon gain the confidence of sources. I certainly don't think the best stories are broken by men who have regular booze sessions with their favourite politicians.'

Malicious Gossip

Journalists with long experience in the field are clearly convinced that the best policy, for both women and men in journalism, is to maintain a professional approach to newsgathering. However, some women point out that even this does not always prevent the gossip and insinuations that female professionals often have to contend with. As Manini Chatterjee says, 'The sexual slur can be a debilitating weapon.'

According to Setalvad, 'It is so much easier to gossip about women, especially if they happen to be glamorous. Politicians and senior journalists are constantly making sexist comments about women in the profession, discussing their affairs, and so on. Of course, some women have had relationships that may have made a difference to their careers and they have not opted out of those situations. But many men have had special mentors, too. So it is not fair to single out women.'

'If women push themselves to get ahead, they are considered "fast" and there is talk about their using "feminine charms", "fluttering their eyelashes", etc.,' complains Gayatri. 'Men's use of caste and other factors to promote themselves is not commented upon in the same way—maybe because they are all involved in such things. Many women leave the profession because of such comments.'

As Savita Kirloskar points out, 'If you are female, people use your personal life as ammunition. It is generally assumed that you have charmed somebody to get your job.'

According to Gangopadhyay, 'Women are often targets of gossip and character assassination, both within the profession and in society. Few women in the profession are left unblemished, particularly in the early period of their careers.' The problem is not as acute in cities like Mumbai and Delhi as it is in places where there are fewer women in the press, like Ahmedabad, says Angana Parekh, special correspondent, *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, who has worked in all three places.

But even in the major cities, insinuations about how a woman got her job or a particular story are not unheard of. The more successful the woman, the more likely she is to be the target of vicious gossip. As Momin says, 'If a woman reaches a powerful position people assume that she slept her way there or is a friend of the proprietorial family or has some other personal connection.

They rarely acknowledge that her professional worth may have had something to do with her success.'

Although Singh maintains that 'nothing is normally said about women who do proper work,' she admits that she herself has been the target of gossip. She cites the example of her coverage of the 1983 elections in Kashmir, when she reported that a particular politician and his party were likely to win, while 'the clique' there at the time were reporting what she perceived as lies. She found that her own paper did not believe her prediction (which, incidentally, turned out to be correct). Later she realized that there were insinuations that she was having an affair with the politician concerned. But, she says, 'The whole thing was so outrageous that I didn't bother about it.'

Kalyani Shankar, political editor, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, seems to prefer to ignore the fact that she has been the subject of speculation about extra-professional connections to a once-prominent politician. However, she does acknowledge that gossip about women professionals is a reality: 'It's still a man's world. Women are more vulnerable to insinuations about sources. Nobody seems to mind if a man is close to somebody but if a woman is close to anyone it is taken to mean only one thing.'

Similarly, senior women in the profession have found that professional criticism from a woman is not taken in the same spirit as similar criticism from a man. For instance, according to Mustafa, a female journalist who does not toe the official line or is critical of official policy or strategy is liable to be attacked with gender-specific descriptions such as 'shrill' and 'strident' and other sexist remarks. She believes the reaction to an equally critical male journalist is substantially different.

Parthasarathy also points out that while aggressiveness is usually accepted as a positive quality in a male journalist, it is usually seen as a negative trait in a woman in the same profession. In addition, she says, some people seem to find it difficult to accept that a woman can be a decision-maker in her own right.

She cites the example of an article in a Tamil magazine which implied that she was trying to promote the cause of a prominent woman in Tamil Nadu politics. According to her, she was caricatured as a stereotypically scheming, manipulating woman using intrigue and behind-the-scenes wheeling and dealing to persuade the 'real' decision-makers in the paper to extend support to the female politician. 'I was portrayed as a woman who has become powerful in *The Hindu* overnight,' she says. 'The terms of discourse would have been completely different if the executive editor in question had been a man.'

Other Identities

Several journalists highlight the fact that gender can be even more lethal in combination with other characteristics. In fact, some suggest that their other identities may be even more disadvantageous than gender. For instance, youth—an otherwise enviable condition—seems to be one such quality, going by what many youngsters in the field say. Young women believe they have to struggle hard to be taken seriously and acknowledged as professionals both inside and outside their organizations. They claim their male contemporaries do not face the same resistance. As Mitra Phukan puts it, 'I notice that interviewees treat me more seriously now than they did ten years ago. The difference is clearly due to age.'

Marital status is another such factor. It is widely recognized that married women in journalism face problems connected with the long and irregular hours of work that a career in the media often involves. While the advantages that single women in the profession enjoy in this respect are often highlighted, the problems they face are rarely acknowledged. For example, as Sharma points out, single women are even more vulnerable to gossip as well as to passes than their married counterparts. Accommodation is an additional problem, with many hostels and house-owners unwilling to provide rooms on rent to single women who keep such irregular and late hours (few men are subjected to such curfews). 'If you are married you have some protection; if you are single, you have more problems,' says Kshama Sharma, chief sub-editor, *Nandan*, New Delhi.

A few women claim that their religious or ethnic identity is even more of a handicap than their gender. According to Khan, 'Being part of a minority is sometimes an even more important factor than gender, both within newspaper establishments and with sources. For instance, your questions and opinions are automatically linked to your minority status.' Describing her nightmarish experience of trying to find accommodation in Delhi, Momin says, 'Everything was wrong with me: I was a woman, I was single, I was a journalist and I was Muslim.'

According to Ramaseshan, who was based in Lucknow in the early 1990s, a secular viewpoint was often more of a burden than gender in an environment where everything, including the local press, was highly communalized. 'If you tried to be objective, you were labelled an ultra-leftist, a Mulayam supporter or even an honorary Muslim. There were celebrations in newspaper offices in Lucknow on the day the Babri Masjid was demolished but participants in such activities were not so readily labelled.' She even received a number of threatening calls after her review of the coverage of the Ayodhya events in the Hindi press was published in the *Economic and Political Weekly*.

Similarly, says Kalpana Sharma, being identified as a feminist can also work against career interests. When she began writing her column, 'The Other Half', in the Sunday magazine of *The Indian Express* in the 1980s, she was warned by a well-meaning colleague against aligning herself so openly with a cause.

Being stereotyped on account of socio-economic background is another disadvantage that seems to plague women more than men (but more on this later).

Health Hazards

Bhattacharjee points out yet another problem associated with a career in journalism that is seldom discussed: the inherent health hazards of a profession which involves long hours of work in closed rooms, sitting on poorly designed chairs in front of a computer screen, eating junk food from here and there (since it is difficult to pack more than one home-cooked meal) and getting hardly any exercise.

According to her, while these problems affect both men and women in the profession, their impact on the latter is greater. This could be because women tend to concentrate fully on work while they are in the office. This, in turn, is mainly because they are under pressure to complete their work and go home to attend to their children, cooking and other housework. Men, on the other hand, tend to take more breaks through the day, partly because they can afford to stay on later. Further, she points out, women often experience long periods of tension because of the dual responsibilities most of them shoulder.

Sabarni Das, senior sub-editor, *Sananda*, Calcutta, agrees that physical fatigue, together with mental stress and the feeling of constantly being on duty, at work and at home, do affect women's physical and mental health. According to her, men tend to be more relaxed and to take time off every now and then to walk about, go downstairs, take tea and cigarette breaks, and so on.

Another major problem that threatens the health of many women in the profession is the scant attention customarily paid by newspaper managements to the need for sufficient and decent toilets. Although the situation has improved greatly in some establishments in recent times, in others the facilities continue to be grossly inadequate and in a scandalous state. Tanushree Gangopadhyay points out that many women contract urinary infections at least partly because they minimize their use of the few, dirty, leaky toilets available. C.K. Meena, freelance journalist and faculty member, the Asian College of Journalism, Bangalore, agrees that newspaper organizations have yet to provide adequate toilet facilities for the growing number of women in their ranks: many still have just one 'ladies' loo'.

Photographers Savita Kirloskar and Renuka Puri highlight another physical problem faced by women in their line of work: shoulder and back pain on account of the weight of the equipment they have to carry around.

Some women believe they are at a disadvantage in the profession because women are not as well-networked as many of their male colleagues. According to Ruchira Gupta, 'Patriarchal structures still operate through old boys' networks. There is still a lot of male bonding and mutual promotion of each other. Many male sources also tend to give stories to fellow men, probably because they think they necessarily rank higher within the organizational power structure. Women in the profession still do not have those kinds of networks and alliances.'

This is how Basu sums up the situation: 'At this stage I'm not groaning and moaning about being a woman in this profession. But the first seven years of my career were tough. I had to go that extra mile—in fact, several miles—to prove that I was as good as, if not better than, the next guy. If it were not for sheer determination and a certain amount of aggression, I would have been sidelined. The first three years were particularly frustrating. But I stayed on and fought to establish myself.'

End-notes

It is clear that gender does have a bearing on the experiences of many women in journalism. What is more, the gender-linked disadvantages identified by most women in the profession far outweigh the advantages some of them believe they enjoy as females. In addition, the combination of gender and other factors such as age, religious or ethnic identity and ideology often proves even more disadvantageous.

It is obvious that women in the profession can no longer assume immunity on account of gender from abuse in the course of their work—even by agents of the state. This suggests that some of the gender-linked benefits they now cite—many based on traditional assumptions about, and attitudes towards, women—may also disappear as people get more accustomed to dealing with female mediapersons.

Similarly, some of the other advantages identified by women have to do with characteristics widely assumed to be inherent in the female sex, thanks to nature or nurture or both. But if women adopt the values, attitudes and styles of functioning which are not only prevalent but appreciated within the profession, they may risk the erosion of these characteristics and, in turn, the favourable conditions they supposedly create.

The factors that continue to inhibit the relationship between women journalists and male sources of information or news reflect the continuing duality of men's attitudes towards women in Indian society even today. There seem to be only two ways in which a large number of men, including people in positions of power and authority, can deal with women who are not related to them. One is to be condescending and patronizing. The other is to be flirtatious or worse. Both are naturally unacceptable to women who wish to establish professional relationships with sources, irrespective of gender and based on mutual respect and cooperation. However, professional considerations often force them to tolerate rather than challenge the unprofessional approach of many of their male sources.

The difficulties many women experience in cultivating sources also illustrate the enduring tension in the interaction between men and women even in urban and otherwise urbane Indian society. It is clear that free social intercourse between the sexes is still not widely accepted in many parts of the country and that fear of social disapproval continues to inhibit both women and men in their dealings with each other.

However, this reality creates a dilemma for women in the press. With most institutions of society still controlled by men, it is a professional necessity for them to cultivate male sources of news and information. But by doing so they run the risk of gossip and character assassination, as well as sexual harassment. The problem seems particularly acute in the more conservative sections of society but the fact that even journalists in cosmopolitan Mumbai refer to it suggests that it will persist for a while yet in other places.

Another remarkable feature of women's experience is the continuing, constant pressure to prove themselves in the field, despite the fact that both they and their predecessors have conclusively established their professional credentials. Clearly, when it comes to gender, preconceived notions are more powerful than demonstrable reality.

It is small comfort that many of the issues brought up by women journalists in India are echoed by their counterparts elsewhere in the world. For instance, as many as 93 per cent of the women who responded to an international survey conducted by the International Women's Media Foundation in 1995-96 believe they face professional obstacles not encountered by their male colleagues. Interestingly, 74 per cent believe their male colleagues do not even recognize these obstacles as problems for women.[5]

4

Wanted: A Job

> *When I appeared for my job interview at the UNI in 1981, the General Manager was surprised to see me. Because of my unusual name, he had not realized that I was a woman. But he couldn't say no to me because I had passed the written test and then did well in the interview.*
>
> Rithambara Shastri

Who would believe today that Tavleen Singh once worked as a secretary in The Ford Foundation in New Delhi? After a journalism course at the Thompson Institute and work experience at the *Evening Mail*, both in the UK, she came back to India in the mid-1970s to find that newspapers in the capital were not very keen to employ women. It was only a year after her return that she finally landed a job with *The Statesman*, Delhi.

It is not surprising, then, that in the late 1960s Gita Aravamudan found that there were no openings for women interested in journalism in Bangalore, her hometown. She moved to Delhi to try her luck and her well-connected aunt there managed to persuade the then editor of *The Hindustan Times* to let her work at the desk, initially without pay. Although she was keen on reporting, she was discouraged by her otherwise kind and avuncular seniors. For one, Prabha Behl (later Dutt) was already a reporter in *HT* and they did not 'need' another woman. Besides, they said, the life of a journalist is too hard for women: 'Why not try advertising?'

Slowly but surely she managed to insinuate herself into the writing stream, doing the few 'light' features that were assigned to her and accompanying seniors on more serious reporting assignments. Although she was ultimately promised a proper job, at least on the desk, it did not materialize because of a wage-related strike at the paper.

Disappointed, she returned to Bangalore and did the rounds of the newspapers there. Eventually, in 1968, thanks to a chance encounter in a train between her grandfather and the proprietor of the *Indian Express*, Ramnath Goenka, she became the first woman to join the paper in Bangalore. She was, in fact, the first woman to work in the four-storey building. Initially she was confined to the mofussil desk. Perhaps it was the belated letter from *HT*, offering her a job in Delhi at a better salary, that finally persuaded the editor to make her the first woman reporter in the city.

In the same year, across the country, Bachi Karkaria, born into a family of journalists ('with journalism woven into my DNA,' as she puts it), left her home-town of Calcutta to join *The Times of India's* journalist trainee scheme in Mumbai. She had to do this because 'In those days it was virtually impossible for a woman to get a job in the Calcutta press.'

A year later, Neelam Upadhye topped the entrance test to qualify for a job in the *Maharashtra Times*, Mumbai. However, she was not called for an interview because the then editor, who had a very long innings at the paper, was against the recruitment of women as journalists. Not one to give up easily, she applied and was selected for *The Times of India's* journalist trainee scheme the next year. When she was posted to the *Maharashtra Times* (the group's Marathi daily), the editor was reportedly so upset that he did not speak to her for a whole year.

Upadhye, now roving correspondent, *Maharashtra Times*, Mumbai, was the first woman to become a reporter in the Marathi press (Lata Raje had been working as a sub-editor in *Loksatta*, the Marathi daily of the *Indian Express* group, since 1966). Indeed, she was the only female reporter in Mumbai then, besides Olga Tellis. The latter had joined *Onlooker* in 1961 and been hired by the Calcutta-based *Ananda Bazar Patrika* in 1964, first as a stringer and then as a full-fledged reporter.

Patchy History

The history of the recruitment of women into the commercial press in India (as opposed to small, non-commercial journals) is full of surprises. It is perhaps natural that Mumbai and Delhi were the first cities to witness the entry of women into the profession and today continue to be the leaders in the number of women working as journalists.

As mentioned in the Introduction, a few pioneering women began working as journalists in these cities in the 1940s and '50s. Many of them owed their breaks to the liberal outlook and paternalistic approach of some of the senior (male) editors of the time. Many of these men may have been influenced by the new thinking on women's status and role in society fostered by the various movements for social and religious reform and freedom from colonial rule that moulded the thinking of many Indians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

'Looking back, I get a feeling that major newspapers in the capital in those years felt rather proud of employing a woman on their editorial staff; it was a sign of their "advanced thinking" and brought them a certain prestige!' wrote Kamla Mankekar, recalling those early days.[1]

A more steady trickle of women began flowing into the press from the 1960s. During that decade, women like Usha Rai, Prabha Dutt (*née* Behl) and Razia Ismail in Delhi, and Tellis and Upadhye in Mumbai, became the first women to break the 'lady' frame and gain acceptance as 'straight newspersons,' as Ismail puts it.[2] Ismail was, in fact, refused a job with *The Statesman* in Chandigarh, ostensibly because of the editor's unfavourable experience with a woman they had once had on the staff. She spent a few years working as a stringer for Delhi papers before getting a job at *The Indian Express* in 1967.

However, it was in the 1970s that a substantial number of women began to actively seek careers in journalism in different parts of the country. Despite the proven track record of many of their predecessors, they did not always find the going easy. As mentioned above, despite her professional training and work experience in the UK, Singh had to bide her time before she got a newspaper job in Delhi.

Seema Mustafa spent more than a year with *The Pioneer* in Lucknow, putting up with blatant discrimination and exploitation because she was 'so dead keen to be a journalist'. After working for months without any pay at all, she was rewarded with a salary of Rs 50 per month, which was subsequently increased, after several more months, to the princely sum of Rs 175. She knew this was less than what her male contemporaries were earning. When she finally moved to the capital to seriously pursue her career, Mustafa was fobbed off by the editors of most major papers. Some of them used the customary, if specious, excuse about women's tendency to get married and have children. She ultimately got a job with *The Patriot* in Delhi.

Small Publications

For many women, smaller publications seem to have provided valuable training and thereby served as useful stepping stones to jobs in mainstream newspapers. For example, Coomi Kapoor, resident editor, *The Indian Express*, New Delhi, returned to India in the early 1970s with a master's degree in journalism from an American university. She then spent two years with *Motherland* (a publication of the erstwhile political party, Jan Sangh) before she was recruited as a reporter by the *Express*.

Even in the 1980s, Manjiri Damle found that the only publication in Pune willing to give her a break was *Tarun Bharati* (linked to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh). After five years there, she still had to go through the grind as a freelancer for one year and a stringer for five years before she finally got a job as a city correspondent-cum-copy editor with *Pune Plus*, precursor to the *Times of India*'s *Pune Times*, which she now works for. It took her over a dozen years to become a full-time reporter, which is what she had always wanted to be.

In Bangalore, *City Tab*, an innovative tabloid which predated more glossy city magazines across the country, provided breaks to a number of women, including C.K. Meena and Roopa Rao, now chief sub-editor/principal correspondent (sports), *The Indian Express*, Bangalore. Yet, in 1981, when Rao responded to an advertisement for sports journalists in the Bangalore edition of *The Indian Express* and stood first in the test and interview, the then resident editor gave her the job with considerable reluctance. Not keen on having a woman on the sports team, he apparently told her quite openly, 'If you had come second, I would have taken the man who came third.'

Business was another area of journalism that was closed to women until recently. Sucheta Dalal, for example, got into the field in the mid-1980s through *Fortune India*, then a small newsmagazine focussing on the stock markets. According to her, at that time, there were no women in the business section of *The Indian Express*, and *The Financial Express* seemed to have an unwritten rule against hiring women. Eventually, she became the first woman to be hired in the Mumbai office of the ABP's *Business Standard*.

The magazine boom of the 1980s provided a window of opportunity to many women. There were probably several reasons for the seemingly greater openness of the magazine world. First of all, it is possible that more women were seeking jobs in journalism at the time when a large number of magazines came into being. Also, many magazine companies were newly set up, had no hoary traditions to uphold and were run by a younger set of managers and editors who were possibly more flexible about gender roles, at least within the professional sphere.

Further, with magazines generally placing a higher premium than newspapers on writing style, those in charge of them may have found women to be particularly suited to their purposes. It could also be that women found entry into magazines relatively easy because, as publications, they were considered less weighty and serious than newspapers.

Strange Contradictions

Local culture has always played and, in fact, continues to play a major role in women's ability to breach the walls of the traditionally male press. For instance, Calcutta-based newspapers, which were slow to recruit women in their headquarters, seem to have had less hesitation about hiring women in the political and commercial capitals of the country.

According to Mankekar, the Delhi edition of *The Statesman* had a woman (Raj Chawla) on its desk and Amita Malik was already writing for the paper when she herself joined the New Delhi edition of *The Times of India* in 1950.[3] Yet, in 1980, Karkaria was the first woman to enter the portals of *The Statesman* in its Calcutta headquarters. Even then she found she was not entirely welcome there, although she had already established a name for herself in Mumbai.

Similarly, the *ABP* group hired Tellis in 1964, enabling her to become the first female reporter in Mumbai, as well as the first woman to join the editorial staff of the publishing house anywhere. But it took another fifteen years for the *ABP* to begin employing women as journalists in its Calcutta headquarters.

Arundhati Mukherjee believes she was lucky to have got a break as a trainee reporter in *Aaj Kaal*, the newer, smaller paper she still works with in Calcutta. When she was looking for a job in the early 1980s, the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* and *The Statesman* were still averse to hiring women. Calcutta-based freelance journalist and music critic Maitreyi Chatterjee says *Amrita Bazaar's* excuse for not employing women was that there was no separate toilet for them on the premises! Amazingly, this is a common, if lame, excuse that continued to be advanced till very recently by several recalcitrant newspaper establishments (more on this later).

If Calcutta was a slow starter, so was Chennai—although the southern metropolis had a slight advantage, thanks to the presence of *The Indian Express*, which has a nationwide reputation for its long-standing, relatively liberal policy towards the recruitment of women.

The Hindu remained a totally male bastion until the late 1970s, when the then proprietor-editor finally caved in to the entreaties of his highly qualified niece, Nirmala Lakshman, and reluctantly permitted her to join the staff. Even today, the paper remains male-dominated in its Chennai headquarters. This is despite the presence there of Lakshman and Malini Parthasarathy, as joint editor and executive editor, respectively, and the fact that several senior women grace its staff in other cities, notably Delhi. However, winds of change are now blowing through the Kasturi Estates in Chennai—thanks, in part, to the induction of a number of women by the group's new daily, *Business Line*.

According to Sudha Tilak, employers in the city still seem to be more interested in female applicants' plans for marriage, children, and so on, than in their professional qualifications and work experience. Rasheeda Bhagat, who became the first female reporter in the city when she joined *The Indian Express* in 1978, says, 'Journalism in the south is still male-dominated. With hardly any job openings and hardly any women in senior positions, women in journalism here have not yet achieved equal status.'

Continuing Resistance

If that is the situation in the metropolises, the situation in state capitals can only be worse. In the late 1970s, Tanushree Gangopadhyay was told by the editors of *The Times of India* and *The Indian Express* in Ahmedabad that journalism was not an appropriate career for women. They suggested management as a more suitable field but expressed concern about how she would manage a job after marriage (inevitable as matrimony is widely assumed to be).

One senior journalist, who had taught the journalism course she had just completed, gave her a long talk about the travails of life with his sub-editor wife, especially the long periods during which the journalist couple could barely meet because of their professional commitments. Finally, in 1979, the *Express* gave her a break and she became the local edition's first woman reporter. She says that made her the first female reporter in Ahmedabad and, indeed, the state of Gujarat.

According to Deepal Trivedi, chief reporter, *The Indian Express*, Ahmedabad, the vernacular press in Gujarat still prefers not to recruit women. She says the few women who are taken on the staff of Gujarati newspapers tend to be the daughters, wives or close friends of senior managers or journalists, and are not always serious about their careers.

Sheela Bhatt, editor (news and current affairs), Star TV, New Delhi, found that she had to bide her time before she was accepted by the Gujarati press as a journalist in her own right. For a long time *Chitralekha* (Gujarati), the magazine she began writing for in the late 1970s, insisted on publishing her stories under the byline of her well-known journalist-husband. 'I worked fourteen hours a day but didn't win recognition easily,' she says. Her efforts to get a job as a reporter in *Janmabhoomi* failed because the conservative management did not want to hire a woman.

It is another matter that she later went on to distinguish herself as an award-winning writer and editor, acclaimed for her daring and recognized for her excellent professional contacts, including kingpins of the criminal underworld. But even today, she is pessimistic about women's prospects in the Gujarati press.

As a whole, the Indian language press has taken longer to accept women within its ranks than its English language counterpart. According to Jayshree Desai, with only half a dozen women in Marathi journalism even in the early 1980s, it was difficult for women to get jobs in major Marathi papers until recently. However, she thinks the outlook is changing and the women coming in now are not being discouraged.

At a women's studies conference in Mysore in 1992, Manimala reported that there had been no recruitment of women journalists in Hindi newspapers since 1988. The situation has apparently not changed for the better since. Kshama Sharma confirms that, with jobs in the Hindi press getting increasingly scarce and most papers using stringers instead of hiring permanent staff, few women are likely to find employment in Hindi journalism in the near future.

While the situation is reportedly grim even in media centres like Delhi, it is far worse in the hinterlands. For instance, according to Renu Sharma, staff journalist with a regional Hindi daily in Jaipur, both entry and survival are difficult for women in the press in Rajasthan. Devyani Bhardwaj confirms that a woman trying for a job in the press in the state still 'has to face a barrage of questions from employers: Can you work at night? Can you go anywhere you are sent for an assignment? Will you be able to work after you get married?' According to her, such questions continue to be asked even after the woman has been given a job.

When Vasavi wanted to join *Jansatta* in Ranchi (Bihar) in 1991, she was asked whether, as a woman, she was sure she could handle the job. This was despite the fact that she had more than proved herself during four years of work as an active stringer for the *Navbharat Times*.

C Vanaja found the doors of the major Telugu papers closed to her after she had completed her journalism course in Hyderabad, possibly because she wanted to be a reporter. By the time she got a reporting job, her male contemporaries from journalism school were already expecting promotions. According to her, 'Although job advertisements do not specify gender, women's applications are often not considered. Telugu newspaper managements think ten times before they hire a woman because they are not convinced about women's capabilities or long-term interest in the profession.' E Mani confirms that for women wishing to work in the Telugu press recruitment is still a problem..

The Bangalore press has been more open to the recruitment of women over the years than the press in the rest of the south, though not without some initial resistance. According to a journalist with the local edition of *The Times of India*, four out of the six recruits who joined the paper recently were women. Even the Kannada press, which lagged behind the local English press in this respect, is reportedly hiring more women now. For example, *Prajavani*, the leading language daily of the state, has reportedly begun to take in a couple of women every year and currently has about a dozen women on the editorial staff (making up about 16 per cent of the total).

Seeming Anomaly

In contrast, the successful resistance to women put up by the press in Kerala until very recently is truly astounding. Given the state's reputation as a leader in women's literacy and education, and the preponderence of newspapers and magazines serving its almost totally literate population, most outsiders find it difficult to believe that women's presence in the local press is, even today, negligible. This is all the more surprising to those unfamiliar with the state's social ethos because many women from Kerala are active in the press elsewhere in the country.

According to a 1985 paper by Aravamudan, who worked as a freelance journalist in the state capital for several years, there were very few women in journalism in Kerala in the 1980s.[4] While some publications simply did not hire women in any capacity, others confined the few women on their staff to magazines and features sections. R Akhileshwari, special correspondent, *Deccan Herald*, Hyderabad, who worked on a Press Commission study of women journalists in south India in the early '80s, says the then editor of the *Malayala Manorama* told her quite frankly that he did not think journalism was an appropriate career for women.

While some people allege that advertisements for newspaper jobs in Kerala used to specify that women need not apply, Aravamudan's paper suggests that employers had subtler ways of screening out eligible female candidates who had passed the qualifying test.

Kusuma Kumari was one of the rare, early recruits who got a job as a sub-editor in *Kala Kaumudi* in response to an advertisement in the 1970s. According to her, the services of a girl who had joined the paper along with her were terminated because the employers did not want more than one woman on the staff. When another woman appeared for a job interview with the *Mathrubhumi* in the mid-80s, she was told that they preferred not to employ women because of the 'practical and technical' problems involved in putting them on late night shifts.

What is more, the Malayalam press is not unique within the state in its reluctance to take on women. At a seminar on Women in the Media held in Thiruvananthapuram in the 1980s, a young woman alleged that she was told by the resident editor of a local edition of a national English daily that he did not want her to join the staff—even though she had qualified for the advertised post. In his opinion, journalism was not a suitable profession for women. When she pointed out that one of the best correspondents in Kerala was a woman working in his newspaper, he told her that the person she meant might be a good correspondent but she was not a successful woman!

At the same seminar, the correspondent of a newspaper which, at the time, prided itself on not employing women said he personally thought women should work only on women's magazines because they would find the company more to their taste. 'In the reporting room,' he explained, 'the atmosphere is very informal and often the jokes are about women's anatomy. Women might find this distasteful.'

Most of the women currently working as journalists in Kerala are in their 20s, with less than four years' experience. According to Vineetha Gopi, there was considerable tension among the girls doing journalism courses with her in the early 1990s about their chances of finding jobs. Small wonder. It was only in 1993 that the *Malayala Manorama*—the state's leading daily, which boasts one of the highest circulation figures in the country—took a woman, Meera K.R., onto its staff. At the same time, the *Mathrubhumi*, which did have a few women on its rolls, had stopped employing any more.

It is not that things have improved vastly since. Even today, says Simi Thomas, trainee reporter, *Deepika*, Thiruvananthapuram, most newspapers prefer male reporters although 'they don't mind one girl'. Some papers seem to have taken a step backwards. According to Leela Menon, the *Express* in Kerala no longer hires women on the grounds that they are not committed, take maternity leave and care more for their children than their jobs. The *Mathrubhumi* is also reportedly unwilling to take on more women, ostensibly because of the problems associated with night duty—although they once used to provide night transport to both men and women working on the late shift.

The Other Side

Of course, there is another side to the story. As some women themselves point out, the reluctance of managements to take on female journalists is not always based on archaic or imaginary notions about the female gender. Their apprehensions are sometimes based on actual experiences with women in their organizations. For instance, the fact that some women see journalism less as a career option and more as just another job may have played a role in prejudicing the case for others.

As Swati Mahalank puts it, 'Women in the press are divided into those who want to be in active journalism and those who don't mind a clerical job.' She concedes, however, that the lack of ambition shown by some women could be due to family-related problems.

Several women point out that if women who are not particularly keen on establishing themselves as serious journalists shirk work or responsibility, using gender as an excuse, employers are likely to be hesitant about hiring any more women. Similarly, if some women drop out of the profession after marriage or children, managements feel justified in not investing in any more. It goes without saying that, even if women wish to be serious about their careers, their families and social circumstances often prevent them from doing full justice to their jobs.

Asked why there are hardly any women on the staff of *India Today* (Tamil), its editor, Vaasanthi, confesses: 'I have decided to hire only men even though I consider myself a feminist. Firstly, there are practical problems with having women here because there is no provision for night transport, and so on. Secondly, the social and cultural ethos in Chennai is such that it prevents women from being as professional as they have to be in a career like this.

'For instance, women here can't or won't work late—most of them want to go home at 5.30 in the evening. Married women don't show enough involvement in their work and seem to view their profession as secondary to their families. Even unmarried girls are answerable to their parents. One talented girl I know came from a conservative family and had to stand outside the gate of her parents' house until she could convince her father about her reasons for being late. Attitudes have to change if women are to be taken seriously in this profession.'

A.T. Jayanthi, resident editor, *Deccan Chronicle*, Hyderabad, has similar complaints. Often, she says, girls in Hyderabad come for job interviews accompanied by their fathers. According to her, 'One father even wanted to sit in on the interview. I refused to let him do that. Later I wondered whether I had done the right thing because the girl never came back. Maybe she was not allowed to take up the job because of my attitude.'

Rajashri Dasgupta says the negligible number of female reporters in the *ABP* group in Calcutta even today is only partly due to resistance from the organization. According to her, the attitudes of girls and their families are also responsible for the situation: 'Many here are still looking for softer options. It is possible to challenge things, at least in *The Telegraph*, but not many choose to do that.'

Vaasanthi and S Subha highlight another cultural reason for the paucity of women in the Tamil press—apart from editors of magazines, who are often from the literary world. According to them, women in Chennai tend to enter the English rather than the Tamil press because urban youngsters who study in 'convent schools' (a hold-all term for private, English-medium girls' schools, whether or not they are run by Christian nuns) cannot write very well in their mother tongue. According to Subha, 'As a result, the Tamil press still depends on male journalists from rural areas, with a strong command over the language, who are also more aware of local issues and more capable of mixing with ordinary people.' Vaasanthi stresses the need for more training for language journalists, particularly women.

Salary Disparities

The continuing resistance in sections of the press to the recruitment of women as journalists can conceivably have repercussions on the remuneration and working conditions of the few women who do manage to get in. While employment and salary patterns in the English press generally conform to certain legal standards, this is not always the case with some sections of the Indian language press. Also, in situations where the press is, or pretends to be, in dire financial straits, women seem to be extra vulnerable to exploitation.

For example, according to many journalists in Hyderabad, most Telugu newspapers now avoid hiring permanent staff, using what is known as a 'voucher system' to pay temporary workers, including journalists. They allege that journalists are sometimes designated as proof-readers or even newsprint lifters to get around the law. By adopting this system, organizations manage to bypass both the salary structures recommended by official wage boards and their other statutory obligations towards regular (permanent or tenured) employees.

While this trend has adversely affected the job and wage security of a large number of journalists in Andhra Pradesh, women seem to be discriminated against more than men even within the so-called voucher system. According to several journalists, some of these women are paid a meagre Rs 1000 per month as consolidated pay for full-time work, while only men working part-time receive such a pittance. Although the women, too, may be officially hired as part-time workers, they can be more easily bullied into working full-time for exploitative wages, they say.

This may or may not be an aberration. However, reports about the Hindi press suggest that it is probably not. For instance, journalists are allegedly being hired as stringers even in the Delhi headquarters of major Hindi newspapers. In Bihar, one journalist worked as a stringer for a major Hindi daily from 1987 to '91, earning a maximum of Rs 1000. She now writes almost exclusively for another Hindi newspaper but is not employed as a member of its staff. Instead, she has been asked to function as a one-woman news agency feeding the paper with exclusive stories.

Apparently a number of men working for the same publication—including some in senior positions—are in a similar situation. The creativity of managements in thinking up ways to bypass statutory wages and to avoid legal responsibilities towards permanent employees is truly amazing.

A number of journalists from Rajasthan imply that some gender-based discrimination in terms of salaries and perks persists there, too. One of them alleges that she worked in *Rajasthan Patrika* in the mid-1980s for a salary of Rs 500. Only after repeated representations over three years was this raised to the paltry sum of Rs 1000, she says. Even then, she claims, she was not confirmed while junior colleagues were not only made permanent but were also given increments so that their salaries went up to Rs 2000. According to her, the management's excuse was that her husband (not a journalist) was earning well—what that has to do with anything is anybody's guess. To make matters worse, her salary was apparently cut when she took leave for a month and a half on account of her husband's illness.

According to her, in 1988 she was transferred from the editorial page to the features section, where she had more opportunities to write but also shouldered a heavier work-load, handling layout and production in addition to writing and editing. The management still refused to raise her salary. When she finally forced the issue, she says, the editor told her that her work was not satisfactory. Yet, she points out, nobody had ever complained about her work till then.

She was also made the target of gossip and insinuations about the alleged favour shown to her by the administrative director who had raised her salary to Rs 1000! Finally, she says, when she was summarily dismissed with just four days' notice, she chose to quit with immediate effect. According to her, although things may have improved somewhat in the interim, women in the paper still face problems, loath as they may be to admit it.

A few women in the English press also claim to have faced discrimination in wages, at least in the past. For example, Mustafa says that at the beginning of her career two decades ago, when she was taken on sufferance by a Lucknow-based paper, she was definitely paid less than her male contemporaries.

However, few journalists complain about direct discrimination in remuneration today. As Aditi Kapoor, correspondent, *The Times of India*, New Delhi, wrote in a 1996 article, 'Going by informal talks with women journalists from the English and the language press, it is reasonable to presume that men and women journalists at the lower and middle levels are paid equally.'[5]

This seemingly happy situation with regard to salaries may be due at least partly to the standard wage structures established over the years by government-appointed wage boards, which are periodically revised upwards. Most organizations traditionally implemented the decisions of successive wage boards, voluntarily or otherwise.

But even this system is not foolproof, as one journalist from Ahmedabad points out. According to her, parity at the entry level does not guarantee equality in salaries later. Subsequent increments, which are more discretionary, can also be discriminatory, with some people receiving multiple increments in one year while others get just the standard, single raise. She says women frequently lose out in such situations because they are often not in a position to bargain.

Now that media organizations are increasingly bypassing the wage boards by hiring journalists on contracts, this handicap is likely to be felt even more. Although contracts often mean higher salaries than those recommended by the wage boards, they also leave more room for negotiation. When most women in the profession are still uncomfortable discussing money and lack the necessary exposure and training for effective financial negotiation, they are unlikely to be able to drive hard bargains.

As one person points out, most women cannot or at least do not talk about money and increments the way many men do: 'We may crib but we are not upfront with our demands. We also don't push beyond a point. So we do tend to get fobbed off with unconvincing reasons. Yet all of us, almost without exception, work much harder than most of the men.' She believes that part of the problem is that there are no clear systems or standards, unlike in the corporate sector. This makes it difficult to establish the existence of gender-based discrimination.

In addition, there are other ways in which many women end up getting the short end of the stick in terms of remuneration. For instance, the popular assumption that women are not the main bread-winners of their families and that they seek employment for reasons other than economic need can lead to their being offered lower salaries than men with similar qualifications and in equivalent jobs.

According to one journalist working for a Hindi publication in Delhi, many people still assume that women work either for personal satisfaction or to make pocket money to buy themselves little treats and trinkets. This generalized and often false notion causes resentment among male colleagues, many of whom still believe that working women take away jobs from men who need them more. A young woman working in an English newsmagazine in the capital says that, even in progressive media organizations, many colleagues assume that women do not need to work for a living. Such assumptions and attitudes can clearly help justify lower salaries for women.

In addition, says a senior woman in financial journalism, the fact that some of the women who have reached the higher echelons of the editorial hierarchy happen to be from relatively affluent backgrounds makes it easier for managements to offer them not just lower salaries but fewer perquisites. She claims to have had a tough time persuading her employers that she really needs the perks she is entitled to, such as a company flat and an office car. She thinks her case was weakened by the fact that senior female colleagues in the organization had not bothered to demand the perks due to them because they have their own accommodation and vehicles. As she points out, many men at the top are also personally well-to-do but no questions are raised about their need for the high salaries and many benefits which go with their jobs.

As Kapoor points out, 'While most media organizations claim to give equal pay for equal work irrespective of the sex of the employee, at higher levels this may not always be true. A woman media boss may earn significantly less than a man in the same job with the same amount of experience.'[6]

If so, the trend would be in keeping with the situation in many parts of the world, including so-called advanced or developed countries. What is more, even where salary structures are equitable, attitudes are not necessarily shorn of bias.

Affirmative Action

An Indian journalist in London points out that organizational commitment to equal opportunities can make it less difficult for women and people from ethnic minorities to get jobs, but the process is still by no means easy. For instance, it took her eight long years to secure a permanent (tenured) job in the UK. To make matters worse, women still have to put up with the irritation of male colleagues thinking (if not saying) that they have got their jobs purely because of their gender and/or race.

Further, she says, what is often overlooked is the fact that subtle discrimination still exists, even if it is hard to establish it as such. According to her, when an organization remains predominantly 'male, middle class and English' despite its public commitment to equal opportunities, the resulting atmosphere makes it difficult for both women and minorities to function freely. They can and frequently do feel disadvantaged and disempowered by the overall climate even where there are no specific cases of overt discrimination.

End-notes

Clearly, women's access to jobs in the press is still far from assured, at least in some parts of the country and some sections of the press. While press conferences in Delhi and Mumbai today are covered by almost as many women as men, elsewhere female reporters and correspondents have yet to become commonplace. While the English language press seems to have opened its doors to women in most parts of the country, the vernacular press in many places still seems hesitant about hiring women, especially for work related to daily news.

From the experience of women over the years, it appears that if the gender bias of employers has worked against some of them, family contacts and paternalism have worked in favour of others. While some women have found it difficult to break into reporting, others have found desk jobs closed to them because of the night shift conundrum. The one (token) woman syndrome still persists in a few outposts and the brand of humour favoured in the newsroom continues to be cited as a barrier to women's employment there. But at least the 'no ladies' toilet' excuse is no longer taken seriously even by managements—although there are reports that the Nagpur office of *Loksatta* still has no separate toilet for women!

Social and cultural attitudes seem to affect women's ability to enter the field even in the late 1990s. If 'feudal' or parsimonious press barons are reluctant to employ women, especially in posts which involve night work, many conservative families also seem to reinforce the idea that women are not free to pursue professions that require them to cross traditional *Lakshman-rekhas* (social boundaries). What is more, at least some women seem to enter the field without fully realizing or accepting that it is not a traditional career with fixed hours of work. So they either expect preferential treatment or drop out altogether (often to take up teaching or jobs in the public sector, which offer security as well as regular routines). This often has repercussions on other women in the field, despite their own professional approach to their careers.

Although standard salary structures and patterns generally do not allow for direct discrimination in remuneration, some gender-based wage discrepancies seem to occasionally creep in for a number of reasons. While some sections of the press are more openly exploitative and discriminatory than others in this respect, subtle differentiation in salaries and perks seems to exist, especially at senior levels, even in major national newspapers.

Whatever the case, the fact is that for many women aspiring to a career in journalism today, things are not as different as they might be expected to be. At a seminar on women in the media in Hyderabad in 1997, Akhileshwari described the current situation in Andhra Pradesh thus: ‘An enthusiastic young woman, dreaming of changing the world by the power of her Reynolds pen, will meet with precisely the same kind of cynicism by editors and newspaper owners that met aspiring women journalists twenty-five years ago. The questions asked and doubts expressed are the same. And the position a “lucky” woman will get will be precisely the same as her sister was given twenty-five years ago.

‘The questions asked of her are: Are you strong enough for the rough and tumble of daily journalism? Will you do the night shift? Can you do reporting? This young girl says: yes, yes, yes, I can, I will, I will try. Then the doubts begin: What if she gets married? Won’t the trouble of training her and the expense involved go waste should she leave the organization after marriage? And god, we will have to give her maternity leave when she has children. Then the cynicism: Can’t I find an equally efficient recruit among men, if not better? Isn’t it safer, more sensible and less troublesome to employ men?’[7]

Clearly it will be some time before women, at least in some parts of the country and certain sections of the press, can rest assured that they will not be asked, as a journalist in Goa who had applied for a job as a chief reporter was: ‘You’re a woman, how will you manage?’

5

Hard Choices

One day the acting bureau chief of our paper asked me to cover the inauguration of a maternity hospital. He said he couldn't possibly assign a man to do it. I asked, 'Why not? I'm not going there to deliver a baby!'

Ratnamala

If Bob Dylan were a woman trying to make it in the Indian press in the 1960s or '70s, one line in his well-known song would surely have gone thus: How many flower shows must a woman write about before she is accepted as a journalist? Indeed, one wonders, how many flower, vegetable, baby or dog shows can anybody attend and still be alive, if not awake, to tell the tale? Yet so many women from those early days have not only survived but lived to see far better days.

Here is how Razia Ismail, chief (information, communication and external relations), UNICEF, New Delhi, describes the trials and thrills of the period in the 1960s when she, along with Usha Rai and Prabha Dutt (*née* Behl), were trying to break what she calls the 'lady' frame:

' ... once upon a time, there were three little feature writers (who) slogged through an unending stream of both unimportant and unfair assignments—delighting in the occasional good breaks—and doggedly tried to jump the many hurdles of "no, you won't be able to tackle this," which came their way. As time passed, they found ways of wriggling past the regular and categorical "Ladies don't do night duty," and "Crime beat *aap ke* *liye nahin hai, aap kya soch rahin hai? Aap feature likhiye-na"* (The crime beat is not for you, what are you thinking of? Why don't you write features?). And they tried to hide their glee when they got the "unsuitable for ladies" stories, and upstaged some of their trousered peers ...

'The day came when we did not find only "flower show" or "interview deaf Moroccan singer" or "find out what Mrs Gandhi is wearing" against our names on the assignment sheet. The day came when "ladies" covered hard news and even got to be special correspondents with ministry beats and tedious politicos and bureaucrats to chase. The day came when the tedious politicos and bureaucrats realized that we were not soft (in the head, or otherwise), but as mean as our trousered *yaars* (term denoting informality and familiarity), and they stopped smiling at us, or offering us special *elaichi-wali chai* (cardamom-flavoured tea).'[1]

Ismail had had some acquaintance with flowers before she took up her first job, with *The Indian Express*, Delhi. While still a stringer based in Chandigarh, she was startled to be asked by Frank Moraes, the legendary editor of the *Express*, whether she was fond of flowers. There was a purpose to his question: 'Lancaster used to write on gardens. Why don't you write on gardens?' She took up the challenge and began to write what turned out to be a successful gardening column—for which she was paid Rs 40 per week!

The professional association of flowers with women (or vice versa) seems to have continued into the 1970s and '80s. When Shree Venkataram, editor, Unnati Features, New Delhi, protested against being repeatedly marked for flower shows, the then chief reporter at *The Times of India*, Delhi, had an explanation: 'There's no one else on the team who knows about flowers.'

New-wave Beats

In the 1990s, however, flowers seem to have been replaced with fashion, beauty and entertainment. According to many young women in the profession today, some amount of gender-based segregation in assignments persists even now, and even in cities like Mumbai and Delhi. As Dionne Bunsha, staff reporter, *The Times of India*, Mumbai, points out, 'It's always a woman who is sent to cover a beauty contest. I don't see why a man can't do it.' Her colleague, Saloni Meghani, is not sure whether it is gender or youth that makes her seem ideally placed to write on topics like Hindi pop music and Valentine's Day.

According to Debosruti Roy Chowdhury, senior sub-editor, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, women are expected to cover fashion and beauty as a matter of routine in Calcutta, too, although they are also occasionally sent to cover the meetings and rallies of female politicians. Likewise, reports from Goa suggest that fashion and beauty form a major part of the 'women's beat' there as well. Female bylines certainly dominated reports on the 1996 Miss World beauty pageant fiasco in Bangalore.

Women in the profession today are, of course, doing far more than covering fashion shows and beauty contests. Over the past three decades they have firmly established themselves as full-fledged, intrepid, hard-nosed, high quality journalists, covering a wide range of events and issues, including high prestige areas such as war and violent conflict, politics, economics and business, defence and international relations.

As Shiraz Sidhwa points out, 'Indian women have been in all the hot spots and have proved more than able to get good stories.' Indeed, female bylines have accompanied some of the best reports to come out of strife-torn areas in and around the country, such as Punjab, Kashmir, the North-Eastern states and Sri Lanka. A couple of women have even gone further afield to report from war-torn Lebanon and Afghanistan. Many have also distinguished themselves over the years with their coverage of communal and caste violence in different parts of the country, including on-the-spot reports of the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya.

Several have gone beyond the routine crime beat to probe the underworld of organized crime, some of them developing exclusive contacts with 'dons' of the indigenous 'mafia'. Again, female bylines have been associated with some of the sensational scoops of the past decade, which have revealed the underbelly of politics and business in the country: bribery and corruption related to the infamous defence deal between Bofors (a Swedish arms manufacturer) and the Indian government, the stock market scam involving Harshad Mehta and associates, the tapes which established the communal bias of the Mumbai police during the 1992-93 riots, the tapes relating to alleged contacts between a major Indian business house and the militant United Liberation Front of Assam, and so on.

These particular examples are cited only to highlight the fact that women in the Indian press have made their mark even in areas of journalism traditionally ranked high on the media's scale of importance and once assumed to be exclusively male spheres. It goes without saying that even more women in the profession have contributed significantly to coverage and analyses of a wide range of important events and processes relating to human rights, justice, development, society and culture.

It would be perilous and pointless, if not impossible, to attempt a comprehensive listing of the scores of female journalists who have 'transcended gender' to make names for themselves as media-persons on a par with the best of their male colleagues. Many of them are mentioned and quoted elsewhere in this book; many more are not. If some of these journalists are better known nationally than others, it is mainly because of the high profile and inherent drama of some of their stories and/or the countrywide reach of the publications in which they appear.

Yet few of these women have reached where they are today without considerable effort. Most admit that women have to be at least twice as good and work several times as hard to prove that they are as competent as the best of their male contemporaries.

It is obvious that many of those who have achieved obvious success possess certain personal qualities—self-confidence, energy, drive, determination and tenacity—that have helped propel them to the top of the field. Some had a head start, thanks to editors (invariably male) who judged them by their professional capabilities rather than their gender and gave them the same opportunities they would have given to a man in their place.

Some had the advantage of gaining valuable, varied experience in the smaller publications in which they began their careers. Yet others found that their specialized education, training or work experience helped them to move quickly into prestigious areas of journalism. Some had lucky breaks which enabled them to get into hard news reporting early in their careers. Very few had personal mentors or sugar daddies, within the profession or outside it, who may have helped in giving their careers a boost.

Professional Performance

Some journalists who have achieved star status within the profession insist that gender has little or nothing to do with whether or not a woman achieves success in the media. They suggest that competence and performance are the sole deciding factors. But Annu Anand echoes the feelings of many female colleagues when she says, 'It is all very well for them to say that nothing can stop you if you work hard and prove you are a good professional. But what do you do if you are not given a chance to prove yourself?'

There is no doubt that the spectacular scoops and insightful analyses of women whose bylines appear with monotonous regularity on the prestigious front, editorial, op-ed and business pages of major publications all over the country inspire hope for the future of women in the field. What is surprising but significant, however, is the fact that prejudice persists despite these obvious success stories.

For example, at a party in Bangalore in the early 1990s I overheard the editor of a newspaper telling a group of people around him that women journalists had not yet proved themselves in the crucial field of hard news reporting, especially political writing. Unable to resist butting in, I reeled off the names of half a dozen women whose names would even then have been recognized by any member of the reading public nationwide.

Looking a bit discomfited, he said, 'Well, all right. But where are the women in financial journalism?' I had just returned from a trip to Mumbai, where another editor had told me about a young woman in his newspaper who was making waves with her coverage of the financial markets. I mentioned her name but he was not impressed. A couple of months later, when she broke the story of the stock market scam, touted as the biggest financial story in recent history, I was sorely tempted to ring up the sceptical editor and ask him whether he had changed his mind about women in journalism.

For the majority of women in the press today, the struggle to overcome gender bias and win respect and recognition as proficient professionals seems to be far from over. The concentration of women in certain areas of journalism is one indication of this reality.

Limited Options

For instance, in many parts of the country, especially but not only in the vernacular press, the woman reporter is still a rare species. The desk is usually considered a more appropriate place for women in the profession; yet, even there, they are often sidelined.

According to many journalists, particularly those working in the Indian language press, women sub-editors still tend to be sidetracked into magazines. If they manage to get into newspapers, they are usually assigned to the women's pages (if any), other features pages, or the low priority 'mofussil', 'district' or 'regional' pages or editions. Sometimes they are accommodated on the business desk. Rarely do they get to handle national or international news. In fact, in many organizations, the general desk—where the 'real' news is handled—is still off limits for women. Even when they are posted there, women are often left to handle the weather reports, city engagements, entertainment listings and other such routine, virtually clerical work.

This situation reflects the reluctance of many managements to put women on the night shift, mainly because that would mean providing facilities such as transport or rest-rooms. However, it is often sought to be justified as indicative of organizational concern for women and their family commitments.

But not everyone buys that argument. As Gouri A. Athale puts it: 'Men often encourage women's sense of guilt about their domestic responsibilities and suggest they take the softer sections or beats so that they can more easily balance work and family. But this is just one way to justify keeping women out of serious journalism.'

It is but natural that some women have no objections to working on these beats, pages, supplements or editions. Not all see them as 'punishment postings' and many, in fact, prefer these assignments for legitimate reasons: personal and professional interest in these areas of work or the convenience of regular, predictable working hours. Some people suggest that the polarization which often occurs even within features sections—women generally handling articles or supplements on homes/interiors, families/relationships, etc., and men those relating to science, sports, and so on—has more to do with personal interest and aptitude than social stereotypes.

Ghettoization

However, the point is that women are not given much of a choice in many parts of the country. And most journalists nowadays are conscious of the disadvantages of remaining in such slots. Chandrima Bhattacharya admits that she initially wanted to work on the paper's women's section because of personal interest. She still sees the value of such pages when they reflect the broad range of women's concerns and interests. However, she now realizes that if women want to grow and rise in the profession, they have to step out of such confined spaces.

Similarly, Prema Manmadhan, senior sub-editor, *The Indian Express*, Kochi, acknowledges the disadvantages of being confined to features: 'You never go up in your career. Although you have to be really good to write features and to handle features pages, this is not recognized.' She believes that her long, seventeen-year stint in features is the reason why she is still a senior sub-editor after twenty-one years in the profession. 'No man would have stuck to features for so long,' she adds.

Swati Mahalank uses a telling analogy to describe the situation of women in many newspaper establishments which restrict women to work they can complete during the day so as to avoid the trouble and expense of putting them on the night shift. According to her, women sub-editors in *Sakal* are assigned to the 'regional' desk, where they handle the five editions of the paper that go out to different parts of Maharashtra and account for its large circulation. 'Not only is our work really important, but we have a heavier work load than our colleagues on the general desk. Our situation is like that of nursery school teachers, who do the most difficult work in education but get paid less and have a lower status than university professors.'

Anjali Mathur makes a similar point when she says, 'The "colour" sections of newspapers, generally seen as female territory, are often more widely read than the "black and white" sections but, within the profession, they are still considered inferior to the "main" paper.'

It is because of this attitude within the profession that many women resist what they see as ghettoization, even when they have no specific objection to the work per se. For instance, Sandhya Nare Pawar, assistant editor, *Chitralekha* (Marathi), Mumbai, initially refused to be confined to the women's section of the magazine, especially since she had covered a wide range of subjects in her earlier job with the Marathi newspaper, *Mahanagar*. She says she did not mind additionally handling the women's section once she had been given a chance to prove herself in the rest of the magazine.

No Reporters Please

The preponderance of female reporters in cities like Delhi and Mumbai today obscures the fact that pioneering women there, too, had to jump many hurdles to get into reporting. It also masks the reality that aspiring journalists in some other parts of the country still face real obstacles if they wish to become reporters.

Dina Vakil returned to India in the early 1970s armed with a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University and a six-month stint in the United Nations' Office of Public Information in New York. When she tried to get a job as a reporter in the paper she now edits, she was categorically told that the *TOI* did not hire women as reporters. She was advised to join the group's women's magazine, *Femina*, and try moving into reporting later. That, it turned out, was easier said than done; she remained in *Femina* for several years.

Carol Andrade, editor, Response Features, *The Times of India*, Mumbai, travelled all the way from Patna to Mumbai hoping to join *The Times*. She did not get selected for the *TOI's* training scheme in 1972 because, she was told later, she was 'too definite' about wanting to be a reporter. Determined to somehow make her dream come true, she applied again two years on. This time she was selected, possibly because she deliberately waffled through the interview. Once she was in, she managed to convince the management to let her be a reporter, although they were still not keen to have women on the reporting team. Telling them that she would do anything a man would as a reporter—including night duty—she became the first woman to be allowed to go straight into reporting after the one-year training period.

Padma Alva, regional manager (north), Press Trust of India, New Delhi, was recruited as a reporter in the PTI office in Mumbai eighteen years ago. However, when she moved to Delhi she had to work on the desk because the office there had not decided whether or not to have women on the reporting team. Rithambara Shastri joined the United News of India in 1981. Even though she was promised a reporting assignment after she had worked on the desk for a while, she says several younger and less experienced men were shifted into reporting ahead of her. Ultimately she remained on the desk and rationalizes that it may have been all for the best, now that she has become the first woman news editor in an Indian news agency.

Even today it is not easy for women to get into reporting, at least in some parts of the country and certain sections of the press. For example, until recently *The Hindu* boasted just one woman on its reporting staff in Chennai. According to C Vanaja, 'No major Telugu newspaper has a single woman reporter in its so-called bureaux in Andhra Pradesh even now.' In Kerala, too, the few women in reporting, apart from Leela Menon of *The Indian Express*, are relatively new entrants into the field.

According to C.G. Manjula, there are hardly any women reporters in the Kannada press. In *Prajavani*, where she works, a few women have been posted as district correspondents but there are none on the reporting team in the Bangalore headquarters. She herself thoroughly enjoyed her work as a district correspondent in Chikmagalur for a couple of years. Back in Bangalore, she was able to continue reporting for a year. However, while she did cover the municipal corporation, the *zilla parishad* and a few political rallies, in addition to culture and literature, she was never assigned to cover the legislature. In fact, the state government and the legislature seem to be off-limits for most women in the Kannada press. According to Manjula, several women are interested in reporting but they are not given the opportunity to hone their political newsgathering skills.

When women do manage to get into reporting, the bulk are still concentrated in the so-called 'soft' areas—if not flower and fashion shows, they get to cover the arts, entertainment, education, health, consumer affairs or 'welfare'. As Meghani puts it, 'Pointing to the few political correspondents is just tokenism. We do find ourselves relegated to soft areas. It's not impossible to resist this but it's not easy either.'

Most women working in these areas are quick to point out that they personally do not think these are trivial subjects. Many admit they are genuinely interested in issues like culture, health and education, consider them as important as politics and business, and believe the press ought to pay more serious attention to such major issues of public interest and concern. However, they are only too aware of the fact that these beats do not rank high in the present hierarchy of news values. The more ambitious among them realize that, whether they like it or not, they have to get into 'hard news', especially political journalism, if they want to rise in the profession.

Political Heights

As Vanaja puts it, 'I don't personally consider women's welfare and other such subjects unimportant or inferior but we need to break into the areas that are closed to us now. At present politics is still a male zone in the Telugu press.' According to K.S. Lata, 'It is true that our newspapers provide lopsided coverage because of the preoccupation with politics and that health, education, etc., don't get the space they deserve. However, leaving coverage of these areas to women is one way of marginalizing them as professionals.'

Neerja Chowdhury moved to political journalism fairly late in her career, after she had won respect and recognition for her outstanding coverage of human rights. She says the main reason why she joined *The Statesman*, Delhi, in the early 1980s was to write on issues relating to women and human rights in the mainstream press. Among the several, complex reasons for her subsequent decision to switch to writing on national politics was the realization that it is important to work within the system—and to resist being sidelined or even pushed out—especially if you want to change the system.

Angana Parekh worked with the *Express Magazine*, the Sunday supplement of *The Indian Express*, in Mumbai before moving to Ahmedabad and into reporting. As a reporter she opted for areas like development and health because she found such work personally satisfying. Later, following Chowdhury's advice, she tried her hand at political reporting in the capital. But, after a year of covering political parties, she chose to return to writing on issues that she believed really affected people. Eventually, however, she went back to political journalism—mainly, she says, for the sake of visibility. 'Ultimately, the bottomline is how often your byline appears, especially on the front page,' she points out. 'Your ability and performance are judged on that basis. If you don't measure up by those standards you are in danger of becoming redundant.'

According to Venkataram, she personally enjoyed uncovering the human interest stories behind the news and thought these were as important as the news itself. Still, as a young reporter, she fought to be allowed to cover 'hard' news: 'If you don't get to cover breaking stories on quick deadlines, you don't get to show that you can do it. Naturally this makes it difficult for you to get a promotion even to the level of senior reporter.'

Unfortunately, not all women in the profession, even today, have the luxury of opting for the fast track. Journalists across the country highlight the continuing resistance to granting women entry into the exclusive club of political writing.

Even Tavleen Singh, who has successfully made her way into it, acknowledges that she faced considerable antagonism when she first began writing a political column in *The Indian Express* in 1987. According to her, 'There was resistance from men in the profession to the fact that I was not only allowed to write a political column but to write one which attempted to humanize serious political issues.' She stresses the fact that the negative reactions to her column, which now appears in *India Today*, have all been from within the profession and not from readers.

She says her attempt to write a different kind of political column had nothing to do with her being a woman: 'I like to read that kind of thing. I felt politics needed to be handled differently.' As she told Rama Jha, 'Actually, what I have done is this: I have simplified the politics instead of writing in a dreary, heavy, pompous style. So I am breaking into their territory, which they don't like women to be in.'[2]

According to Manjiri Damle, who has handled several beats and developed good contacts even in the supposedly rough world of labour unions, including the local *rikshawallahs'* union, 'There is still a weird idea in Marathi journalism that women don't and can't know much about politics. They prefer them to do "harmless" things.'

Sandhya Taksale agrees that women are rarely given hard, political news to cover. But, she says, it is also true that many women in the Marathi press choose not to try their hand at political journalism, possibly due to lack of confidence. However, as Damle points out, 'A lot depends on individual preference and each person's ability to handle things. But many women are not given a chance to see what they can do.'

According to Parvathy Devi R, despite her own background of political activism in the Students' Federation of India and her family's political connections, there was a tendency even in her paper (associated with the Communist Party of India [Marxist]) to push her towards 'soft' news relating to women, children, culture, and so on.

Hard News

Besides being excluded from the charmed circle of political journalists, many women find they are also kept away from what are considered other 'unsuitable' assignments. For instance, Aditi Kapoor thinks 'there is a tacit assumption that women can't cover hard business news, especially if you dress conventionally, look feminine and don't conform to the stereotypical image of the aggressive female journalist.' At another level, Vineetha Gopi says she does not know whether it is her gender or her inexperience that makes seniors hesitate to send her out to cover major accidents or any event that takes place at night.

According to Rajashri Dasgupta, it was perhaps only to be expected that people in the *Business Standard* in Calcutta in the 1980s would have certain ideas about what a woman could and could not be sent to cover: how can a girl cover a fire? What is surprising, she says, is that such paternalistic attitudes have not totally disappeared: 'Even now there are only two female reporters in *The Telegraph* and they are not in real hard news. Of course, they are young, but young men don't seem to have to prove themselves as much.'

Like many others who have managed to 'transcend gender', Arundhati Mukherjee does not think these are insurmountable hurdles. She certainly plunged straight into hardcore reporting without waiting for anybody's permission. Grateful to have found a job as a reporter in a new Bengali paper at a time when the major papers in Calcutta were still relatively closed to women, she went about proving herself in her first weeks on the job.

For example, on her way to work one rainy night, she heard about people being electrocuted in some water-logged areas of the city. She went straight to an affected area and visited victims in the hospital, often walking in waist-deep water. According to her, when she walked into the office later that night and proceeded to write the story, 'Everyone was surprised. They had assumed that I wouldn't even come in to work. After that I got all kinds of work. They saw that I wanted and could handle tough assignments.'

Another inspiring story, full of endearing, quotable quotes, is that of young Ajanta Chakraborty, staff reporter, *The Statesman*, Calcutta. She became the only woman on the reporting staff of the paper when she managed to get herself transferred there in 1997, after two years on the desk, on the strength of a couple of news stories she had written while still a sub-editor, which had appeared on the front page.

She found that she was not very welcome in the reporting section: 'Perhaps they thought I would just hang around, be a nuisance and do only featurish stories.' Left beatless for a while, she was not pleased to be finally given education. 'How far can you go in education?' she asks. 'You can't hope for scoops because nothing much happens. At the most you can say that things are not going well.'

With 'no guidance and no contacts', she had to be inventive in order to prove herself and turned to the letters to the editor for inspiration. The story ideas and sources she got through a close scrutiny of readers' letters led her to adopt healthcare and the State Human Rights Commission as her beats. She believes both these have great potential, unlike education. 'Hospitals are happening places,' she explains. 'I picked health as a beat for the very reason I rejected education. And, while most reporters merely reproduce the Commission's reports, I follow up the cases.'

'I always try to do anti-establishment stories,' she adds with great clarity and confidence. 'I think the press exists to criticize the establishment. Even if the government is basically good, I think it's our job to point out whatever is bad in it. I'm interested in the main section of the paper, not the frills.'

There are, no doubt, many stories like these of women in different parts of the country—not only in metropolitan Mumbai and Delhi—who have stormed the 'hard news' citadels of the press through sheer grit, determination and imagination.

False Mystique

But many others refuse to accept the traditional norms within the media which dictate what is difficult and important and what is not. A surprising number question the validity of conventional ideas about 'hard' and 'soft' news, particularly the assumption that the former is somehow superior to the latter. Even many of those who accept the current reality—that political journalism is the surest route to success—admit that the mystique surrounding it is largely undeserved.

Most reject the notion that hard news coverage is more difficult and demanding than writing on what are normally seen as 'soft' subjects. Says Sidhwa, who does not agree with the traditional hierarchy of news values, 'In fact, it's easier to do hard news stories because they virtually write themselves.' According to Alva, 'Everyone has the breaking story. It is much tougher to chase a soft story.' As Meena Menon points out, 'Environmental journalism, for example, is no joke. You sometimes have to walk miles for a story. You have to travel and live in less than comfortable conditions. You don't get handouts.'

Rupa Chinai believes the pressure to be in hard news and the phobia about having to concentrate on the political, economic and business beats is felt more by men than by women. According to her, women in the profession generally tend to be sensitive to social issues. And, she points out, beats like health are difficult to work on, with each story requiring a great deal of legwork.

Sevanti Ninan, who spent the first few years of her career covering development (because 'there were stories crying out to be done'), says it took a long time for those reports 'to crawl up to a decent place, with adequate space and display.' On the other hand, she points out, when she substituted for a political correspondent one

Sunday, she found her story was instantly on page one. 'A lot of what is called political reporting is humbug,' she says. 'But it is always considered good copy.'

Leela Menon believes the reluctance to let women do political reporting stems from 'the male assumption that women are not fit to analyse politics, which they think is on some kind of a higher plane.' But, according to her, 'That is pure bunkum.' In fact, says Radhika Ramaseshan, life on the political beat is much easier because it is not difficult to produce stories related to politics. Nupur Basu agrees. 'Political stories are the easiest ones to handle,' she says. 'Politicians are always more than willing to talk. The brouhaha about political reporting needs to be exposed.'

Even young journalists soon discover that covering politics is not all that it is made out to be. 'Initially I thought political reporting was *the* thing,' says Gayatri. 'I was very impressed with the elite crowd of senior political journalists—their proximity to power, their clout. I thought it was great to be on first name terms with bigwigs, to think nothing of picking up the phone and talking to the chief minister or the chief secretary. But now I realize that it's all just an illusion.'

This is how Mathur sees the situation: 'Political journalists are the brahmins of journalism. Many men consider it beneath their dignity to do any other kind of journalism. It's a vicious circle: politics reigns supreme in the media, so men get into political writing, and so political journalism becomes important. Yet much of what appears in the papers is nothing but political gossip. Politics is rarely covered in a way that clarifies how it is connected to people's lives. But still everyone wants to be a political journalist because that is considered the acme of journalism. It's actually much more difficult to find topics, angles and even information in the so-called soft areas. Writing style is also more crucial for 'soft' stories. Still, even young reporters take 'soft' assignments more lightly despite the fact those stories are usually better read.'

According to Mahalank, 'You do need to know about politics and economics but political writing is not the whole and soul of journalism. Everything is ultimately related to society; so you need to examine and write about society.' Singh makes a similar point when she talks about her approach to political writing: 'There was a time when political columns did nothing but political gossip-mongering. I just widened the field. I see rape also as a political issue. In fact, in a developing country everything is political.'

Manimala says she does not believe in the traditional distinctions drawn between 'hard' and 'soft' news. She also points out that readers certainly do not differentiate between the two. In fact, she says, she is remembered primarily for her human rights stories although she has written on all kinds of subjects, including politics.

Gayatri also thinks the importance given to political reporting is misplaced: 'Managements assume that politics sells but this assumption has not really been tested. Within the profession a midnight meeting of a political party is considered more important than a human interest story, even though people tend to read the latter with more interest.'

Delhi-based columnist Pushpa Girimaji began writing a column on consumer affairs when her editor mooted the idea in the early 1980s. It soon became popular and is now syndicated. Nevertheless, she says, initially she had doubts about whether she was doing the right thing and fears about being marginalized. Although she enjoyed writing the column and received tremendous response from readers, she joined the news bureau of her paper to ensure that she stayed in the 'mainstream' while persisting with the column. The ribbing she received from colleagues about vegetable prices and so on only exacerbated her anxiety. Ultimately, thanks to continuing reader response, she realized that consumer affairs was an important area which deserved serious treatment and decided to specialize in it.

Bachi Karkaria had a similar experience when she took up the civic beat after joining *The Statesman* in Calcutta. She says she had to put up with snide remarks from colleagues about 'pothole journalism' and 'gutter journalism' until her stories began to find a place on page one. She believes her coverage of the city gave civic reporting a legitimacy it had never had before.

Several women point out that there is considerable pressure on those who are perceived to be good at their work to move into the high prestige areas of politics and finance. For example, Akhileshwari says she was often asked by seniors why she persisted in writing about Naxalites (leftist revolutionaries). They advised her to start writing on finance because 'that's where the future lies.' Says Soma Wadhwa, special correspondent, *Outlook*, New Delhi, who writes on development-related issues by choice, 'Some of my seniors in the first paper I worked for thought I was OK and so pushed me into political journalism. But I didn't enjoy it.'

New Vindication

Many women in the profession have risked marginalization to continue writing on issues they consider important even if the journalistic fraternity does not. Today they feel vindicated by what they see as a growing recognition within the media that these are legitimate subjects which deserve to be highlighted. For Chinai, her very designation as special correspondent—health, is proof that some of the erstwhile 'soft' areas are now being seen as serious issues worthy of consistent coverage.

Similarly, Girimaji points out that consumer issues are no longer seen as peripheral. In the initial stages her column was often sidelined and buried in some inconsequential page. But today virtually every newspaper wants to have a consumer column and many of the issues she covers appear on the front page. She believes this is at least partly because the traditional divide between 'hard' and 'soft' news is less rigid now. In any case, she says, a consumer column can encompass practically everything. For example, she makes it a point to analyse the manifestos of political parties, not to mention the annual national budget, from the consumers' point of view.

Alva says things have changed even in news agencies. Because of the greater demand for soft stories now, a special features cell has been created within PTI. Initially, this was dominated by women but now both men and women work in it by rotation. According to her, many men also enjoy doing the so-called soft stories.

Madhu Jain agrees that the lines between 'hard' and 'soft' news are blurring. According to her, women's issues, culture, the arts, and so on, which were once devalued within the profession and left to women to cover, are now being perceived as important fields. 'Back of the book is not back of the bus any more,' she says.

Parvathi Menon points out that while many women have successfully entered the previously masculine territories of politics and business, few men have been able to make an entry into the equally important areas of journalistic concern which have traditionally been seen as female terrain. In the final analysis, says Basu, women have come out on top: 'We have proved that we can do everything, from the arts to politics, with equal interest and competence. Most men have limited themselves to doing the so-called mainstream or hard news stories while most women have a much larger canvas.'

End-notes

The controversial American cigarette advertisement with the catchy slogan—'You've come a long way, Baby!'—may well be applied to Indian women in journalism today. It is certainly true that they have come a very long way from the traditional 'women's beats' of flower and baby shows to establish themselves as full-fledged professionals with a proven track record of high quality journalism in a wide range of areas, including prestigious ones like politics, business and violent conflict.

However, many of those who have achieved obvious success in the field admit that the road to the top has been, and continues to be, rocky. What is more, in some parts of the country and some sections of the press, women are still struggling against ghettoization of various kinds. In some places, they find it difficult to get into the reporting stream. In others, women sub-editors find that they are not readily posted to the news desk. In addition, as some young women in the profession point out, even in the metropolitan press, there is a tendency to push women into the '90s equivalent of flower and baby shows: fashion shows, beauty contests, celebrity events and pop culture.

While many women are personally and professionally interested in subjects and sections which rank low in the media's scheme of things, they realize that staying with those topics and/or pages could mean professional stagnation. Faced with this dilemma, some have chosen to swim with the tide while others have opted to buck the trend.

Interestingly, however, a large number of women reject the traditional definitions as well as ranking of 'hard' and 'soft' news and subjects. Many of them—including several involved in 'hard news reporting'—debunk the mystique surrounding political writing and point out that many of the so-called 'soft' areas are often far more difficult to cover properly. Some journalists also point out that many women have transcended these traditional divides and proved themselves capable of covering a wide range of topics with equal competence.

This debate finds echoes elsewhere in the world. According to British journalist Ginny Dougary, 'The very choice of words is revealing: soft equals human interest, which for some reason is considered to be female, a suggestion of fuzziness, vulnerability, warmth, bordering on the sentimental; hard equals male, with inescapably phallic overtones, tough, gritty, unequivocal cold logic ... The arguments in favour of shaking up the male/female, hard/soft format of newspapers are persuasive—particularly if the interests of men and women continue to converge.'[3]

A recent special report in *The Sunday Times of India* was headlined, 'The "soft" issues are the real issues.' According to the introduction, 'Children, education, health, water, food, population—these are not women's issues, they are critical to the future of the country. It is precisely because the Indian polity has been so aggressively macho that these gut concerns have been neglected, and India continues to remain at the bottom of the pile despite its vast resources, its towering strengths.' Although the story had to do with the debate on how to ensure the greater representation of women in legislative bodies, the issues raised in the 'intro' are equally relevant to the media.[4]

It goes without saying that any remaining structural barriers to women's full, free and equal participation in the media need to be removed. At the same time, it is important to recognize that entrenched professional notions about what is important and serious and what is not need to be challenged. Women in the profession today seem ideally placed to do both.

Strangers in the Night

Women were not allowed to work on the night shift when I joined UNI as a sub-editor in Bombay in the 1980s. Some of my male colleagues protested when I volunteered for night duty. The news editor commented, 'So you don't mind being raped!' And laughed till he was breathless.

Meena Menon

Overcoming such obnoxious attitudes and the complete absence of facilities, Menon and other women in the news agency managed to do even the late shift, which ended at 2.30 a.m., if only to prove a point. Those who had a long commute home stayed in the office till dawn. Sujata Anandan was the first and only female reporter in the agency at the time. She used to walk from the office to her hostel after night duty. Since this meant going down a street known as a pick-up area for sex workers, she made it a point to carry files and books in an attempt to signal that she was not in that business.

Over the years, many other women have struggled to be accepted on a par with male colleagues by insisting on doing night duty, whatever the odds. Vidya Nehru Dutt, who worked for the *National Herald* in Lucknow in the 1950s, was possibly the first woman to offer to work on the night shift, according to Kamla Mankekar.

A couple of decades later, Carol Andrade insisted on taking her turn at night duty when she became a reporter in *The Times of India*, Mumbai, in the early 1970s. She knew that a major reason for organizational resistance to taking women on the reporting team was the assumption that they would not be available for night work.

Vasanthalakshmi, former assistant editor, *Udayam*, Hyderabad, is the first and hitherto only woman to become a news editor and assistant editor in a Telugu newspaper. According to her, she worked on the night shift from the beginning of her career in the late 1970s. 'Since I lived close to the office, getting back home was usually not a problem,' she says. 'Sometimes I slept in the office even though there were no special facilities. I knew there was a lot of resentment among men in the profession about women not doing the night shift.'

Arundhati Mukherjee was one of the first women reporters in Calcutta in the early 1980s. 'I never asked for special treatment,' she says. 'The paper did not provide transport after night duty. So I slept in the office.'

In Chennai, S. Subha made it a point to remain in the office as late as the senior men did, whether or not she had any work. When she became editor of *Junior Viketan*, she stayed till the magazine was put to bed and went home alone on her two-wheeler in the dead of night. 'There was no point protesting about the lack of facilities,' she says. 'They would simply say: don't stay late. I knew that would retard my progress in the profession. I wanted to prove I could be treated just like a male worker.'

In Bangalore, journalists have traditionally enjoyed the flexibility of going home on their two-wheelers. According to Nupur Basu, although *The Indian Express* did provide transport at the end of the last shift, she preferred to ride home on her moped even after midnight: 'I would just wear a helmet and a coat and tuck my long hair in to camouflage the fact that I was a woman.'

Unpleasant Experiences

It is not that there were and are no problems. As Madhu Jain says, 'There is always the anxiety about safety.' And, as Mitra

Phukan points out, 'After all, one cannot ignore the fact that the streets are unsafe for women late at night.' Shree Venkataraman talks about the harassment she often encountered in Delhi while returning home late after work in the 1970s. Finally, she took to waiting for the office transport at midnight even if she had finished her work much earlier.

'It is in terms of personal relations and the social environment that gender continues to play a role in one's professional life,' says Prema Vishwanathan. According to her, one of the most frustrating aspects of working in Delhi was having to be conscious of her femininity, especially while scheduling late night appointments, because of the real threat of eve-teasing, molestation and even rape. She says the situation is somewhat different in Southeast Asia, particularly in Singapore. However, she admits that recent events in Indonesia have demonstrated 'that primordial male chauvinism continues to lurk below the surface.'

Sipra Das had a frightening experience while working in Calcutta in the 1980s, the details of which she revealed in a 1997 article in *The Indian Express*. According to her, she was alone at a bus-stop late one night, on her way home after work, when a man suddenly appeared and tried to gag her. He managed to stifle her screams, but she put up a fight and eventually succeeded in breaking free. He pursued her as she ran away. However, she escaped by jumping onto a bus which happened to come along at just the right moment. She admits that she was shaken but says she did not let the incident deter her from continuing with the career she had chosen. She believes that late nights, irregular timings and risk-taking are all part of the package deal in this profession.[1]

Things are not much better even now in many parts of the country. A young sub-editor in Kerala recounts the disagreeable experiences she had when she was based in Thrissur (Trichur). She had no option but to walk home after the night shift because there were few autorickshaws about at such an hour. She found, to her annoyance, that it was generally assumed that a woman out on the street so late in the night could not be anything but a prostitute. She was harassed on the streets and targetted for gossip despite her efforts to make it clear that she worked for a well-known newspaper.

The sympathetic news editor made an official but futile request for a company car to drop her home. Eventually he took to dropping her back in his own car. Once she moved closer to the office, colleagues began to walk her home. Finally, after she was accosted one night by a man with a knife, she asked for, and was granted, a transfer to Ernakulam, where the situation so far has been better.

Not all the problems faced by women working late hours occur outside the workplace. Some troubles originate within the office. Women in the Press Trust of India have been working on the night shift since 1985. Most of them prefer it that way, especially since they (and now the men, too) get transport home. But, according to Padma Alva, problems arose on the 'extra nights', when there is no supervisor on the shift, especially if a solitary woman happened to be on duty. This was mainly because some male colleagues would come into the office inebriated. Ultimately the management decided not to have the extra night duty for women.

The security factor can create organizational problems, too, especially in offices with few women on the staff. For example, at the PTI office in Chennai, the practice was to put the two female sub-editors on the staff on night duty together to make them feel comfortable. But, says Usha Ram Manohar, this led to a staff crunch the following day, when both were off duty. Finally a decision was taken not to assign the women to the night shift.

Useful Facilities

However, in Mumbai and Delhi today, the night shift per se is no longer an issue, especially in the English language press where some newsrooms boast as many women as men on the staff. Women in most news organizations in these cities routinely work on all shifts. Almost all newspaper establishments in the capital provide transport after the last shift for all journalists, irrespective of gender. As Pamela Philipose says, 'Transport has made all the difference.'

In Mumbai, where the relatively efficient and (till recently) safe public transport system operates almost round the clock, some provide vehicles upto certain suburbs while others now have restrooms where women on the late shift can sleep through the remainder of the night. Saroj Iyer, chief sub-editor, *The Times of India*, Mumbai, remembers a time when everyone used to sleep on desks pulled together. With computers taking up space on desktops now, such arrangements would be more difficult. But, fortunately, they now have dormitory facilities on the premises.

However, even in Mumbai today, the issue remains alive in sections of the Indian language press. For instance, in the Marathi daily, *Loksatta*, women are put on the night shift only on days when the work load is particularly heavy—when the annual national budget is presented in Parliament or election results are announced, or during special crises.

According to Shubhada Chaukar, who did continuous night duty for nearly eight months in her previous job with the *Free Press Journal*, 'Night shift is a major problem. Not all women are ready to do it, even in rotation, unless they are provided with proper accommodation or transport.' Significantly, although *The Indian Express* provides transport up to certain suburbs, its sister publication, *Loksatta*, offers no such facilities.

Nightwork Disallowed

Further afield, in other parts of the country, the situation is expectedly worse, with even sections of the English language press placing restrictions on women's work after dark. The most amazing example is that of *The Hindu*, in its Chennai headquarters, where women still work only on the day shift. The group's business daily, *Business Line*, located within the same compound, has women on night duty and, in its fortnightly newsmagazine, *Frontline*, women stay late on busy days.

It is difficult to unravel the real reason for this anomaly in an otherwise progressive newspaper establishment which, incidentally, provides transport for all staff on night duty. Members of the editorial hierarchy claim there has been no 'demand from below' for a change in this unstated but established policy. Female members of the staff maintain that even those who would like to do night duty, if only to improve their career prospects, are not allowed to work on the late shifts.

According to one person, she once asked to be put on a later shift so that she could gain experience in handling national and international news. Although her request was granted and she was assigned to the 2–8 p.m. shift for a while, official disapproval was apparently made clear: she was allegedly kept on the same shift continuously for six months instead of being assigned to it on rotation like her male colleagues. Later, ostensibly on the editor's instructions, she was returned to the morning shift.

Women on the *Hindu's* editorial staff in Chennai admit that many of their female colleagues are happy not to work at night. According to other journalists in the city, jobs in the paper are considered convenient and comfortable, partly because women there do not have to do night duty. It seems to be a chicken and egg situation, with the 'no night shift for women' policy possibly attracting relatively unambitious applicants and the management thereby vindicated in its assumption that no women would wish to do night duty.

Obviously cultural factors also determine how the night shift conundrum is viewed in different places. For example, in Chennai, senior women in the profession, like Vaasanthi and Rasheeda Bhagat, report that many female journalists are unwilling or unable to work late hours because of family commitments or attitudes. According to them, this includes young, single women. Editors in *Business Line*, too, admit that some women on the editorial staff are reluctant to work on the last shift despite the fact that it ends relatively early, at 10.30 p.m.

Professional Disadvantage

But the fact remains that not being allowed to do night duty is a disadvantage for those who wish to rise in the profession, especially in the news business. Some, of course, sacrifice ambition for convenience. For instance, one woman who joined the *Mathrubhumi* in Kerala in the early days reportedly retired as a sub-editor because she did not want to do the night shift even when the paper allowed it.

However, most women are conscious of the negative consequences of avoiding night duty. And quite a few are unhappy about the continuing policy of many managements across the country to deny women the opportunity to work at night. According to Gouri A Athale, 'While some women may wish to opt out of night work, many do want to do the late shift because they know that inexperience with handling page one will work against them when they are due for promotions.'

Swati Mahalank also believes that the professional progress of women in her paper is bound to be impeded by the fact that they are not allowed to do the night shift. She says: 'It hurts me when male colleagues ask, "What do you know of the difficulties of night shifts?"' However, she admits that not all her female colleagues would want to work at night. As she puts it, 'Women in newspapers are divided into those who want to be in active journalism and those who don't mind a clerical job.'

The other disadvantage of such a policy is that it helps newspaper managements justify not hiring women for editorial positions. As Jayshree Desai points out, 'The bogey of night shift is often used to discourage women.'

According to several journalists in Hyderabad, most Telugu newspapers do not put women on the night shift. Some then use the fact that women in the profession do not work at night as an excuse not to hire any more. Similarly, the problem of women and night shifts is apparently used as an excuse not to confirm female journalists in their jobs, even though men working part-time face no such problems and women are not always offered the option of working on night shifts.

Journalists in the city say that while some women may not want to do night shift, others would not mind as long as adequate facilities are provided. Even in English newspapers which provide transport to all journalists working on the last shift, they allege, women are generally assigned to the commercial, mofussil or magazine desks, which do not require night work.

According to Pamela D'Mello, correspondent, *The Asian Age*, Panaji, most newspapers in Goa avoid employing women on the desk because of the problem of night duty. Another journalist in the state reports rumours that certain papers are not going to take on any more women because of their reluctance to work late. However, she points out, transport is an important issue in Goa because many journalists do not live in the relatively small capital city, where newspapers are based. They often have to travel more than an hour through the countryside to get home. This clearly makes it difficult for managements to provide transport and for women to make their own way home safely at night.

In Kerala, where most newspapers have only recently begun to recruit female journalists, the night shift issue is often used to keep women out of core newspaper work. For example, the few women sub-editors in the *Deepika* publishing group are apparently assigned to its evening newspaper or magazines; there are no women on the desk of the morning daily.

Even the *Mathrubhumi*, which once had women sub-editors working on the night shift, has now transferred them out of the news desk. There is, apparently, an unofficial 8 p.m. deadline beyond which women are not supposed to remain in the office. Although this is a management-imposed curfew, it is apparently used to justify not hiring any more women. The new policy here, as in many other newspaper establishments, seems to be based on financial considerations—specifically the question of night transport.

Yet, at one time, the paper used to provide transport to both men and women working after 9 p.m. Later, that facility was stopped and a conveyance allowance introduced for staff working late into the night. Male journalists were happy with this arrangement because they can travel by bus at all hours and treat the allowance as extra income. Although women were never put on the latest shift even then, they did manage to work up to midnight. If they were able to wind up their work at a reasonable hour, they used two-wheelers to go home. If they were delayed, they got family members to pick them up.

According to some staff members, the new policy of not assigning women to the night shift may have been prompted by the fact that they were beginnning to ask for facilities such as a retiring room or transport. As one woman puts it, 'Night shift is not the problem, lack of facilities is.'

Interestingly, the *Malayala Manorama*, which admitted women onto the editorial staff of the daily as late as in 1993, now expects its female staff to work even on the very last shift, which ends at 3 a.m. No transport facilities are provided, although the editors say restrooms are currently under construction. At present, the few women on the desk, who share a house, walk home together. But the young women have no complaints, saying they like to do night duty, believe work should be done equally and derive personal satisfaction from being able to do everything required by the profession.

Nocturnal Problems

However, the night shift remains a problem for many women, with or without the statutory facilities they are entitled to. Contrary to expectations, married women with household and family responsibilities are not the only ones who find late hours difficult to cope with.

Several young, unmarried women seem to find night work a burden, especially if they have to do it at a stretch. For example, according to Debosruti Roy Chowdhury, 'Juniors are always assigned to the link and night shifts. We never get the morning shift. I enjoy my work but I don't think this kind of time schedule can be kept up for a long time. I don't know whether I will be able to cope in the long term.'

In some instances, night duty seems to have been used almost as a punishment. For example, one woman in a Telugu paper has reportedly been made to work continuously on the night shift for four years, without any breaks or facilities whatsoever. According to a fellow journalist, who believes this is a case of victimization, the woman sleeps in the teleprinter room after completing her work. In one Marathi paper, a single woman was reportedly given continuous night shift for years on end just because she happened to be unmarried.

Some women mention family and social disapproval as an additional problem they face. Many parents are unhappy about the late hours required by the profession. In addition, the professional requirement of night work is said to dim female journalists' chances of matrimony! Quite a few women claim that marriage proposals either do not come their way or do not work out because many prospective in-laws, if not husbands, look with disfavour on women whose working hours are so long and irregular and who often get home late at night.

Indrani Raimedhi, senior sub-editor, *The Assam Tribune*, Guwahati, reports that, as the only woman on the editorial staff of the paper, she is exempted from night duty. She is content with the situation because she says it would be difficult for her, as a married woman, to work late hours. In Rajasthan, too, most newspapers do not expect women to work at night. Few journalists there seem to object, pointing out that women face problems of safety and security, as well as domestic duties and social disapproval.

Things do not seem to have changed much, at least in some parts of the country and sections of society, since the early 1980s, when journalists quoted in an *Eve's Weekly* article on women in the media described their travails. 'I was coming home really late (after covering a riot) and I heard people muttering, "*Aaj dhanda acha tha*" (business was good today). I went home and cried but now nothing bothers me. I close my ears to what people are saying,' said one journalist then.[2]

In the same article, another woman recounted how people in her housing colony kept aloof from her because they disapproved of her coming home at odd hours and the number of different people who came to meet her. 'They know I'm a journalist. They often read my name in national magazines. If I were a man, they would say, "How interesting!" and become friends,' she pointed out.[3]

On the other hand, some women say they face no such problems from their neighbours even in conservative, lower middle class residential areas. 'I leave my house in the afternoon and come home late at night,' says Ishani Datta Ray, sub-editor, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta. 'Such a routine could give people ideas. But I find there is no gossip. In fact, there is a lot of respect for me and my work.'

Disrupted Schedules

Nevertheless, a number of young women today seem to be thinking in terms of career changes because of the disruption of life caused by long and irregular hours of work. As one sub-editor in Calcutta put it, 'How long can I go on juggling home and work under such circumstances? I don't even get enough sleep, working two nights and then having to come in for an afternoon shift on the third day.'

According to Rajashri Dasgupta, 'The tough hours are at least partly responsible for the high turnover of female sub-editors.

Married women are not the only ones who find the going difficult. Even young people face tension in the family on account of the late hours. Also, the hours ensure that they have hardly any social life except with others in the profession. Ultimately all this is not good for the press either. Thanks to the quick turnover, there is often no second line of subs with experience. As a result, there are many avoidable mistakes in the papers these days.'

Anita Rao Kashi accepts the long and late hours demanded by the profession as par for the course. However, she admits that the duty schedules in newspapers disrupt social and family life, in addition to making it difficult for journalists to maintain social contact with friends outside the profession. She points out that both men and women feel the strain, citing the instance of a male colleague who once remarked that he has forgotten what an evening walk is like.

However, the majority of women who find the night shift difficult to cope with do so because they continue to shoulder primary, if not sole, responsibility for home and family. Meena Menon, who fought to be allowed to do night duty in the 1980s, today believes the night shift issue should not be held against women in the profession under the present social circumstances.

As Parvathy Devi R puts it, 'Given today's social conditions, night shift should be an option. For example, while men can sleep late in the morning after night duty, women can't afford to do that. In Kerala family structures and practices haven't changed and probably won't change for a long time.' Although she led the struggle for facilities in her organization and it now offers transport after 9 p.m., as well as a restroom with beds and an attached toilet, she thinks many women still find night work difficult to cope with.

Tulasi Bhaskaran, chief sub-editor, *Deshabhimani*, Thiruvananthapuram, works on the late shift, usually up to 1 or 1.30 a.m. She does all her housework, makes preparations for dinner and keeps tea ready for the family before leaving for work in the afternoon. Since her house is close to the office, she takes half an hour off mid-way through the shift to dash home and quickly serve dinner. 'The tension is over after that,' she says. 'Once that is done, I don't look at the time. I really like my job. Having to shoulder complete responsibility for domestic arrangements is the only problem.'

Many women opt out of the fast track—or at least the news desk—because of the clash between night work and family responsibilities. Sudeshna Basu, senior sub-editor, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, says she has chosen to work in features not only because she enjoys it but because night shifts are difficult to handle along with domestic responsibilities. She believes many women are forced to opt out of the profession altogether because of this problem.

However, Parvathi Menon thinks it is wrong for women to demand exemption from night duty. She believes such a step will certainly hinder the process of creating equal rights in the workplace for women journalists. She does not see any reason why women cannot do late duty, since the night shift roster is planned well in advance and most organizations now provide transport home. 'There seems to be no valid reason for a woman to shirk night work unless she is pregnant,' she says. Many senior women in the profession agree with her. In fact, some would question the validity of using pregnancy per se as an excuse.

At the same time, Ayesha Kagal, senior editor, New Delhi Television, Delhi, points out that gender cannot be dismissed as entirely irrelevant in all situations. In their zeal to be politically correct, non-discriminatory and gender-blind, she says, senior people in progressive media organizations sometimes forget that the world is not a perfect place and that women continue to be vulnerable in certain respects.

She says she found herself in the odd situation of having to intervene when a young female reporter was about to be sent to cover the midnight lifting of prohibition in Haryana for a television news programme. She pointed out to colleagues that the situation could turn ugly because the reporter was likely to be the only woman on the scene and she would be surrounded by drunken revellers. In addition, as a television reporter she would be fairly conspicuous. Kagal thinks it is a sign of the times that no one else had thought of the possible consequences of sending a woman, particularly a young woman, out on that particular assignment.

End-notes

Clearly, the debate over women and night work will continue to rage for a while yet. At one time, the struggle to be allowed to work on the night shift was part of the larger battle to be recognized as full-fledged journalists. At that stage, women journalists were often willing to forgo the facilities legally due to women involved in night work so as to establish themselves as serious professionals. In any case, they knew they were in no position to bargain: admitted into the profession on sufferance, they could easily lose what little they had gained by insisting on their rights. They also understood that professional progress depended on their full participation in all aspects of the job.

Today, many sections of the press in different parts of the country provide either night transport or restrooms as a matter of course to both men and women in the profession. However, some continue to evade their responsibilities in this regard. They then compound the problem by using this as an excuse not to hire women or, at least, not to assign them to night duty. Only one major newspaper, which does provide night transport for all staff, inexplicably continues to restrict night work for women in its headquarters. While this situation suits some women, it goes against the interests of those who wish to rise in the profession, especially in the field of daily news.

Still, many women today seem to be hampered more by societal impediments than infrastructural ones. The fact that women continue to be particularly vulnerable to violence—all the more if they are out alone at night—is hardly their fault. The threat of male violence is, in fact, a major form of gender-based oppression, which not only affects women's self-confidence but often prevents them from fully participating in society. Yet it is they who are blamed and often pay the price for their vulnerability.

The gender-based division of both labour and responsibility that persists in the domestic sphere continues to restrict women's freedom to participate fully in their professional lives. Similarly, unchanging social attitudes towards, and expectations from, women inhibit their ability to exercise professional options. As Rema Thambi, senior sub-editor, *Deshabhimani*, Kochi, puts it, 'One needs more than twenty-four hours in a day to be a good journalist. Women don't have that!'

It is, no doubt, true that asking for special concessions, such as exemption from night duty, can only work against women in the short as well as long term under the present circumstances. However, it is not clear whether the old system and schedule of shifts must continue to be followed in a profession now equipped with the latest technologies.

As women the world over have pointed out, even today the organization of work in the media (and many other fields) takes little or no account of household and parental responsibilities. Some have argued that this is because men have traditionally occupied decision-making positions and, as a result, organizational procedures and structures have generally reflected male norms and priorities. With more women at all levels of the workforce now, the time has come for a fresh look at work so that it can be seen as just one, albeit essential, component of life.

However, it is important to recognize that these issues do not affect and should not concern women alone. It is true that women still shoulder primary, if not sole, responsibility for the home and family. That situation must obviously be remedied. One way of enabling both men and women to share domestic responsibilities is through the appropriate restructuring of work. But, more importantly, the need of the hour may be to reorganize work so that both men and women can lead fuller and healthier lives, incorporating work, family and leisure in a more humane lifestyle.

7

All in the Family

You can talk about equality but you have to think about the children. Family commitments, especially children, do slow down your career. You can't really do much without the cooperation of the family. But there's no point crying about the disadvantages after choosing to get married and have children.

Seema Deshpande

If there is one common factor that could knit women in journalism into a community (however uneasy) it is, ironically, the family. Most women in the profession have little trouble agreeing that family commitments, especially parental duties, have a tremendous impact on their careers. Only a handful (if that many) would pooh-pooh the constraints placed on professional life by the continuing gender-based division of labour and responsibility in the domestic sphere.

Virtually across the board, women talk about the stresses and strains of shouldering the double burden of work and family in a profession characterized by long and late hours as well as irregular and unpredictable schedules. While many have quit the profession altogether on account of the seemingly irreconcilable differences between the demands of work and family, others have opted out of full-time employment in an organization.

Many of those who have managed to stay at the post admit that domestic responsibilities have influenced their choices within the profession. And even the brave ones who have soldiered on against all the odds admit that the going has been far from easy. Hardly anybody suggests that family commitments do not make a difference to professional life.

Anita Pratap is proud of the fact that she neither expected nor obtained any special privileges or concessions as a woman in the field. She has stayed late at work, travelled at short notice and done whatever else a journalist has to do. But, she says, 'You have to be willing to pay the price for your success. I have paid my price.'

'Ultimately you have to bear the consequences of your personal choices,' suggests Pratap. 'One would love to have a complete life: career, marriage, motherhood—but it doesn't always happen that way. One thing or another gives way. I am not saying you should expect that to happen but, if it does, you have to deal with the setback and carry on with life. There will be losses in some areas, gains in another.'

Not all successful women are so unequivocal about the choices they are confronted with. 'Synthesizing all the different roles one has to play is a problem,' says Neerja Chowdhury. 'Sometimes women take a step backwards for the sake of better synthesis. This is a highly competitive and stressful career in itself. On top of that, family obligations take a lot out of you. You sometimes wonder whether it is all worth the while. The upshot of this is that you tend to go up to a point and no further. The price is too high and the profession doesn't compensate in any way that makes the sacrifice seem justifiable.'

Professional Options

While acknowledging the family-related dilemmas that confront women in the profession, other women are pragmatic about the choices they have made. Bachi Karkaria, for instance, says she has always followed her husband wherever his jobs took him, organizing her career accordingly. Since most of the moves eventually worked in her favour, she has never felt the need to change that pattern.

However, she admits, 'In every other way, my job was my priority. My children have grown up with that reality. I'm sure they would say today that their mother didn't spend as much time with them as other mothers did. Every time I've thought of changing that and taking time off for them, something has come up to prevent it from happening. For example, I thought of taking leave during the kids' final exams but that happened to be the very time when *The Metropolitan on Saturday* was launched. When it came to the crunch, I chose my career.'

Sevanti Ninan opted out of regular employment when she was a correspondent attached to the Delhi bureau of *The Indian Express*, chiefly on account of parental responsibilities. 'I really enjoyed my work but I couldn't handle the hours. Political reporting requires a lot of hanging around at party offices, politicians' homes, etc. I didn't want to compromise on my child-rearing duties. It may be easier for women whose husbands' careers enable them to step in and help out. Otherwise it becomes difficult to carry the double burden. Actually, what we all need is a wife.'

That reminds me of the time I was offered a job by the male editor of a weekly features magazine. He mentioned that he normally met the senior people on the staff in the evenings. I told him that would not suit me because I had a child to get home to. 'So what?' he exclaimed. 'I have three children and a wife!' For the first and last time in my life I found the right thing to say at the right time. 'That's the difference,' I said. 'I don't have a wife.'

I was assistant editor of *Eve's Weekly* when my daughter was born. I did not want to be away from home throughout the day while she was a baby. I tried in vain to convince the management that I could easily handle the job by spending half the day in the office and working from home the rest of the time. When I handed in my resignation, my editor, Gulshan Ewing, remonstrated with me, suggesting that I was going against my own convictions about the need for women to have options. I explained to her that I was exercising the one option I was left with which I could live with.

There is no getting around the fact that most women do have to make hard choices. But, of course, each person acts as she must. As Sushila Ravindranath points out, 'There is no doubt that family commitments do pull you down and make reaching the top position difficult. Managing this conflict is difficult for all women professionals, not only women journalists. But I don't think there are any rights or wrongs in these situations. It's a question of individual choice. The only certainty is that you really can't have it both ways: you have to decide what you can live with. I'm not going to be judgemental about the choices people make.'

Shobhaa Dé has no such qualms. According to her, 'Those who try to prove that marriage, family, and so on, are not stumbling blocks inevitably find that it has not been worth the price. Many of them are burdened with an overwhelming sense of guilt as "failed" mothers or wives. Most of the women at the top are either single or belong to this type.'

But several journalists say they once hesitated to mention problems related to the home and family in the office because they assumed that such matters had no place in professional life. Many of those who used to feel that way now believe that it is not necessarily true. They accept that their earlier reluctance to acknowledge such problems may have had to do with their own lack of self-confidence and maturity, as well as their initial zeal to prove that they were as good as 'one of the boys'.

Marital Problems

Like Pratap, Arundhati Mukherjee is pleased that she has achieved what she has without claiming any special rights or concessions on account of gender. But, although she is single, she is conscious of the limits within which married women usually have to function.

'However important a woman is, however big a post she holds, and even if she has a maid to help at home, a lot of her time does go to the family,' she points out. 'This is a very time-consuming and demanding profession. It means reading the papers in detail and talking to people on the phone in the morning, even before setting out for work. Married women have other things to do in the morning. On the other hand, most male journalists don't have to do anything at home, whether or not they are married.'

According to her, 'It is necessary to be unmarried at least in the initial stages of your career, when you are in the process of developing sources, building up networks, etc. Marriage may be all right at a later stage, after you have done the groundwork and established yourself.' Sajeda Momin agrees. 'It is almost a prerequisite in this profession to remain single,' she says. 'To do well in this career you have to negate most other aspects of life and be available, on the job, twenty-four hours a day.'

Malini Parthasarathy seems to endorse this view. She points out that she has opted to remain single and devote herself entirely to her career, while her older sister, Nirmala Lakshman, chose to combine a career with 'marriage, children and all that'. She implies that single-mindedness is a professional asset that married women often cannot afford.

'Even now women have to make some hard choices,' says Bachi Karkaria. 'Some defer marriage, others defer children. But, in doing this, they may be giving up something that may not always work to their advantage.'

On the other hand, some single women in the profession question the general assumption that only married women have problems reconciling the conflicting demands of their careers and families. 'Why is it assumed that single women don't have any family responsibilities?' asks Bhavna Somaiya, editor, *G*, Mumbai, 'I have an aged mother for whom I am singly responsible. I give up many professional opportunities because of that. As far as work is concerned, I think those who are willing to work can be productive irrespective of such considerations. I just work solidly from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.'

A.T. Jayanthi agrees that it is unfair to presume that single women are free to pursue their careers without any hindrance from their families. In Mumbai, she shared a small apartment with her parents and siblings, including a married brother and his family. As a journalist then covering 'Bollywood' (Bombay's equivalent of Hollywood), she often got home late at night and needed to sleep late in the mornings. This led to inconvenience and tension all around. For one, because of the limited space in the flat, her sleeping in meant that everyone else had to be as quiet as possible. For another, some members of the family felt she was not doing her full share of household chores. She has since moved to Hyderabad. But even now, as the eldest daughter, she is expected to shoulder a great deal of responsibility for the entire family.

On another note, a number of women stress the personal and professional benefits of family ties and commitments. As Rasheeda Bhagat puts it: 'It's true that you have to deal with a lot of pressure and guilt because your role as mother, wife, provider of meals, and so on, clashes with your profession, especially if you take your work seriously. But it is a double-edged sword: the family can be a support system, too.'

Karkaria makes a similar point. 'Having family responsibilities can be helpful professionally,' she says. 'For one thing, I think I am a real woman because my husband and sons make it their duty to constantly bring me down to earth. I am grateful for this because I see a lot of unreal women in this profession. What's more, as a family person, I bring a lot to my work. I know not only how to manage several things at the same time, but also the importance of give and take, listening to others, taking other people's needs and wants into consideration, and so on. I think having a family helps you deal with your job with more balance and equanimity. It makes you more well-rounded.'

Family Support

A number of women acknowledge that it would have been extremely difficult for them to have made it professionally without the support of their families. 'You need a lot of family backing to manage in a field which involves such odd hours and in which your timings and days off don't always coincide with those of the rest of the family,' says Usha Ram Manohar.

Neelam Upadhye agrees. 'If I have overcome all the hurdles I faced in my career it is only partly because of my own confidence and faith in myself,' she says. 'The support I received from my family was also crucial. If my mother had not stayed with us and practically brought up both our children, it would have been impossible for me to have done all that I have.'

But others claim that even family support does not fully compensate. According to Hema Ramakrishnan, special correspondent, *Business Line*, New Delhi, 'It is tough to cope with domestic responsibilities even if your husband, parents and children are all cooperative. The additional burden certainly stands in the way of career advancement.'

Besides, not everyone is blessed with an understanding and supportive family. As Kalyani Shankar points out, 'The house, children, guests—they are all seen as your responsibility. Ignorant relatives and in-laws don't recognize that you have a high-pressure job. They don't understand what this profession is all about.'

Prema Vishwanathan believes that most women, 'even in this profession', still tend to carry a double burden of responsibilities within the home and at the workplace. According to her, 'When an attempt is made to institute a more democratic system at home, all hell can break loose.' But, she points out, this phenomenon is not restricted to India. Even in places like Singapore, 'Women do have to go that extra mile to preserve peace at home even while they scale new heights in their profession,' she says.

Some women point out that families tend to be particularly intolerant of demanding careers like journalism. According to a journalist in Kerala, her educated and outwardly progressive husband did not mind her earlier job in book publishing, which involved regular working hours. But he did disapprove of her decision to take up a more challenging and time-consuming one in a daily newspaper.

She echoed the feelings of many others when she accused men in the state of being hypocrites and having double standards: 'They talk a lot about all sorts of things but when it comes to their own convenience everything is different.' Interestingly, both she and a fellow journalist in the same city claim that their children have always been more appreciative and supportive of their work than the adults in their families and social circles.

Several women report that their mothers-in-law are resentful if they return home late—presumably because they are usually the ones left holding the babies (literally and figuratively) while their mothers are at work. The problems seem particularly acute in conservative, middle class, joint families, where the daughter-in-law is expected to fulfil her traditional role, whether or not she works outside the home.

As Renuka Puri puts it, 'If you are married and from a middle class family, there are bound to be problems. You have to make sacrifices. At first my in-laws were proud of me and my work. Later they began to fuss about my timings. They wanted a typical *bahu* (daughter-in-law). They were not happy with me.'

To reduce the tension at home, she opted out of news photography and now concentrates on taking pictures for features. 'It is frustrating to see colleagues doing more exciting work,' she says, 'but I know my limitations. If I refuse a night assignment because of my family commitments, I can't really demand a good one at another time. So I have to be content with routine assignments.'

'After marriage things do change,' says Rajni Nagpal, senior sub-editor, *Jansatta*, New Delhi. 'You have many more duties—housework, childcare and so on. There is always a conflict of interest between the profession and the family. You have to deal with a lot of doubt and guilt. It is difficult to concentrate on your work. I have chosen to do light features now because I don't even get time to think. It's ironical that earlier, when I wanted to get into reporting, the option was not available and now, when the possibility exists, I have too many other responsibilities and commitments!'

Asha Mathur also admits that marriage and the additional responsibilities it entails have affected her work: for one, she is no longer as free as she used to be to take up reporting assignments. In addition, she says, she has to be careful about the hours she keeps, given her middle class background, the neighbourhood in which she lives and the conservative nature of society in Jaipur.

Rajkumari Rohila confirms the social pressures brought to bear on women in the profession in Jaipur: 'If they return home late at night, the neighbours view them with suspicion. If they go out on an assignment with a male colleague, accusatory fingers are pointed at them.'

According to Devyani Bhardwaj, 'The first time I reached home slightly late, there was great tension in the house. Perhaps that was understandable. But this happens even today. And it is very common in Jaipur.' As Jaipur-based freelance journalist Balvinder Kaur points out, 'Families in Rajasthan are still traditional. They think we should get married and sit at home.'

Mathur, Rohila and several other women from Rajasthan point out a special disadvantage of this particular profession. According to them, their work schedules usually prevent them from fully participating in the celebration of religious festivals and this makes families even more resentful.

Changing Priorities

Even those who do not face such external pressures sometimes find that their own priorities change, especially after motherhood. 'After I had a baby I stopped having a career,' says Carol Andrade, who fought hard to become one of the first female reporters in the Mumbai edition of *The Times of India*. 'It became just a job. In fact, I regret not being able to take time off from work to be with my child.'

'Children do restrict your career to some extent,' says Jyoti Punwani. 'I worked from home for a year after my baby arrived but finally had to quit because I didn't want to go back to full-time work. I have missed out on a lot by opting out of regular, full-time reporting. My juniors are now in higher positions than I am. Most successful women journalists don't have children—there are just a few exceptions to the rule.'

According to Bharati Pradhan, she managed to keep a full-time job until her child was two years old. After that she opted out because she found that she was getting too dependent on family members for childcare and did not want to leave the child alone with a maid.

Swati Bhattacharjee sums up the situation many women find themselves in. According to her, 'The hours involved in this profession are a restraining factor. Similarly, family considerations are a constraint. For example, I always wanted to do reporting but I couldn't, or at least didn't, because I had a child to think of. As a father I may not have made such a concession—some men do but most don't keep such things in mind while making career decisions. Most leave it to their wives to look after the home front. At the theoretical level you think: why not combine home and career? But there's a lot of guilt and tension involved.'

She also draws attention to another important issue that often gets overlooked in the debate about balancing family and work. 'It is getting increasingly difficult for me to get even an hour a day to myself,' she says. 'In many other professions you can plan your day to some extent but in journalism it is not always possible. You have to be constantly on your toes. You can't even take all the casual leaves due to you. To make matters worse, I can't really relax even when I get home because I'm on duty there, too. It's like being on a treadmill. I don't get enough rest and feel tired all the time. I find I am even losing my reading habit, which is not a good thing, personally or professionally. It's not surprising that many women experience burnout. Quite a few say they can't dream of continuing in this profession.'

Parental Attitudes

Another category of problems related to the family does not often come up for discussion: those faced by young women in the profession. Surprising as it may seem, it appears that even today a number of women face opposition to their choice of careers from parents and other members of their families and social groups. This is particularly true in some parts of the country.

Some of these reservations have to do with the timings associated with the profession. Quite a few parents are apparently still reluctant to have their daughters out of the house after dark. According to Kareena B Thangamam, sub-editor, *Mangalam*, Thiruvananthapuram, despite her being a public figure (elected a member of the local *zilla* council at twenty-one), her father still expects her to be home by evening. Indrani Raimedhi says her parents did not want her to take up the first job she got after graduation because it involved night duty.

Some objections are clearly due to social conservatism, with certain sections of society still disapproving of close interaction between the sexes and of women's unfettered mobility—neither of which can be completely avoided in a profession like journalism. To make matters worse, in some parts of the country a distorted image seems to persist of journalists in general and women who go into the profession in particular.

According to Deepal Trivedi, 'There is not much respect in the wider society for women journalists. Crude comments are often made about their character and lifestyle.' Simi Thomas says her family was not very pleased when she took up a newspaper job—partly, perhaps, because of societal misconceptions about what the work involves. According to her, insinuations about women in the profession are common: 'If you get an exclusive it is assumed you got it in a "bad" way.'

Apparently, such attitudes can sometimes lead to matrimonial problems even before the wedding. Several women mention that marriage proposals have floundered because prospective husbands and/or in-laws were not keen on a marital alliance with a journalist. Some say this is primarily because of the odd working hours and, to some extent, the nature of the work. Others suggest that additional factors are at work here.

For instance, according to Renu Sharma, 'Middle class families often find it psychologicaly difficult to accept a journalist as a daughter-in-law, mainly because she may have a bold approach and may not easily succumb to pressure.' Jyoti Shukla confirms that the image of journalists as 'fiery' individuals does inhibit prospective partners and their families. Trivedi highlights another disadvantage of journalism from the point of view of Gujarati men (especially, one presumes, those who belong to communities involved in business): poor pay for much work!

Some parents who are opposed to this profession are more keen on careers which offer better working conditions as well as better status, prospects and returns. 'Since I am a first generation graduate,' says C. Vanaja, 'my family would have preferred me to take up a government job, which they think is more secure and comfortable.' Jobs in the public sector and academia seem to be the preferred career options for women as far as families are concerned. This may be because, as Renu Ramanathan, reporter, *The Hindu*, Kochi, points out, 'A woman's career is expected to fit in with the structure and convenience of the family.'

Many young women, particularly in Kerala, mention the special problems female journalists face in finding suitable accommodation, mainly because of the late and irregular hours of work the profession involves. Hostels for working women in many parts of the country continue to have strict curfews which are difficult for journalists to adhere to. In many places, the 'paying guest' (lodger) arrangement is not yet common and, in any case, as Ramanathan puts it, people are not keen to provide accommodation to 'bachelor girls'.

Somaiya says her own conservative family was not very keen on her becoming a journalist, particularly a 'film journalist', but they did not stand in her way, partly because they assumed it was a passing fancy. However, she never went for late night film shows or parties and avoided going to outdoor shooting locations until she was an established journalist. Even now, as an editor, she tells job applicants to ensure that their families do not mind their working in this line. But she finds that times have changed and young journalists today face less pressure from their families, at least in cities like Mumbai.

Time Schedules

Much of the current tension involved in balancing work and family comes from the consistently late hours journalists are expected to keep. Many women think there is far too much emphasis in the profession on staying late in the office. Much of the time, they say, it is possible to plan the working day in such a way that work can be wound up at a reasonable hour. They point out that nobody minds putting in extra hours when the situation demands it; what is difficult for women to take is the routine and unnecessary extension of the working day late into the night.

As Aditi Kapoor puts it, 'Most women, especially those who are married, don't want to hang around till all hours in the office. I prefer to schedule my appointments in the morning or early afternoon and get to the office by 3 p.m. On most days that would allow me to write my story and leave by 7.30 or 8 p.m.' According to her, only men and unmarried women can afford to stay on in the office endlessly.

Sandhya Nare Pawar agrees that it is seldom absolutely necessary to linger on in the office. 'Men make five hours of work into ten by just hanging around. Only women who are not married or, at least, don't have children do that. When there is work I stay late, when there isn't I don't and I won't. I can't see why I should neglect my home and family, especially my children, for no reason. But there are always comments if you go home at a decent hour *after* completing your work.'

Kapoor also points out that the editorial hierarchy has an unfortunate tendency to measure professionalism by the hours spent in the office: 'For example, there is one man on the team who is always there. Never mind if he is drinking tea or playing computer games much of the time—he is still a favourite with the editors. Nobody seems to look at output or productivity or the number of exclusive stories.'

Nupur Basu believes that many male colleagues who hang around in the office are simply wasting their time: 'They seem to have nothing better to do. They just allow themselves to be consumed by their profession.' But obviously the overall ethos has an impact on most journalists and many assume that the current practice is inevitable. For example, according to Vasavi, 'Journalism requires total devotion. It is not possible to lead a normal life. One has to distance oneself from family and friends to some extent.'

The strange thing is, says Kapoor, that 'Women's family commitments are made much of but nobody takes account of the fact that men also have liabilities—old parents, kids, etc. Their taking time off to attend to their other duties is not held against them in the same way. They don't seem to earn so many black marks.'

Similarly, there is not much evidence of official disapproval of male journalists who drink in the afternoon or come into work with a hangover from the previous night's excesses. Although such habits are hardly conducive to productivity or quality work, they seem to be generally ignored or tolerated within the profession.

Rita Manchanda agrees that family responsibilities do place constraints on women, especially in terms of time. But, she says, that reality also makes them economical in their use of the time available to them. She highlights the achievements of women who have managed to get scoops without working crazy hours or have functioned as effective department heads as well as good wives and mothers. 'Quite a few women manage to do demanding political beats and at the same time spend time with their families,' she points out.

Flexible Hours

On a different but equally positive note, some women say the irregularity of hours in the profession can be an advantage because it often allows them leeway to incorporate their domestic and family responsibilities into their work schedule. Ira Jha points out that the shift system helps her to adjust timings with her journalist husband so that one of them is always at home with the children. Similarly, Annam Suresh says the odd hours do provide a certain amount of useful flexibility.

Parvathi Menon shares this view. 'It is true that the area of greatest gender inequality is the home,' she says. 'For 98 per cent of working women, a profession outside the house in no way changes the situation inside the home, where they have to cook, clean and care for the children (or find others who can do these things for them). However, I think journalism as a profession makes it easier for women to juggle home and family. Flexitime is built into the job—in practice if not in policy. Appointments can be adjusted and worked around. A number of my women colleagues, who have recently had babies, are even able to continue breastfeeding their babies after rejoining work.'

However, this may not be the experience of everyone everywhere. Many women in the profession highlight the need for structural adjustments to incorporate the demands of motherhood. According to Bindu Bhaskar, chief sub-editor, *Frontline*, Chennai, 'Provision for proper flexitime is a real need. Working mothers often have to take time off to attend to their parental responsibilities. Many colleagues resent this. But there's not much that women can do about the situation on their own.'

'Managements do need to be more sympathetic when women have babies,' says Devika Sequeira. 'Women have a right to take time off to have babies and spend time with them, especially in this high-pressure career. However, most employers expect you to return to work within three months. At the same time, ironically, the press highlights the importance and benefits of breastfeeding.'

Of course, there is another side to the story. Some senior women point out that a few fellow women do try to shirk work using their families, particularly children, as excuses. For example, Saswati Chakravarti says one person tried to get out of working on Saturdays by claiming that she needed the day off to help her child with his studies. According to her, this was clearly a specious excuse since there is obviously nothing sacrosanct about Saturdays as far as this parental duty is concerned.

Nevertheless, many journalists highlight the need for official recognition within the profession that some conventions about work schedules may have to be re-examined—and not just because of women's special needs within the present social set-up. As Punwani points out, 'Such chronically long and late hours are not good for family life in general. This is true for both men and women.' She believes that it should be possible today for journalists to work from home, if they wish to, without affecting productivity or work schedules. Chowdhury also believes that 'the system really needs to allow for more flexibility, especially now that it has been made possible by technology.'

Changing Times

A few signs of change have appeared over the years. In the early 1980s, when my (then) little daughter began to accompany me to work on Saturdays, it was definitely not the 'done' thing even in relatively liberal Mumbai—although it was evident that most of my colleagues looked forward to her visits. But now I notice that quite a few working women travelling on Mumbai's suburban trains have a child or two with them on Saturdays and other holidays.

Nor, it seems, is the trend restricted to working mothers. Ritu Sarin says many senior editors today are family men who even bring their children to the office. According to her, 'This is making a difference to professional attitudes towards such matters as family holidays, children's birthdays, and so on. There is certainly more understanding about all this. Besides, both men and women in the field today discuss such issues as children's schooling with their colleagues. Things will change in the profession as the participation of husbands and fathers in family life goes up.'

Mrinal Pande agrees. 'Most editors today are midnight's children,' she points out.[1] Many of them have working wives or daughters. There is a definite change in attitudes. Many of them have aged along with me and I have seen them develop as human beings. They seem to be particularly affected when their daughters bring home stories of discrimination and harassment. Wives don't change husbands as much as daughters change fathers!'

At least one publishing house has long been informally enabling women to work at their convenience: the Magna group, headed by Nari Hira (who, incidentally, is a single man). According to Dé, Hira was 'progressive without realizing it. He allowed flexitime long before it became a buzzword. You could work as and when you wished. You just had to deliver the magazine on schedule.' Pradhan acknowledges that she is still able to hold down a job today because of the flexitime permitted in the group.

When I met Parthasarathy, she had just fielded a call from a young woman on *The Hindu's* editorial staff in Delhi, who had asked to be excused from duty on Sundays because that is the only day when she and her husband can be together. 'What do you think of that?' she asked me.

End-notes

Clearly, the issue of balancing work and family continues to be a vexatious one even in the new millennium. Although most women concede that domestic responsibilities do impinge on their freedom to pursue their careers, their ways of dealing with this dilemma are quite individual. While there is broad agreement that married women with children face the greatest difficulty in reconciling professional and familial demands, it is obviously unfair to assume that all single women are footloose and fancy-free. Many of them merely face a different set of family-related problems.

Some women point out that supportive families can be a boon to the professional woman in a number of different ways. At the same time, families that refuse to accommodate the peculiar nature and time schedules of the profession can make it difficult for women to cope. It is clear that the problem arises mainly because of the continuing gender-based division of labour and responsibility in the domestic sphere. Some tension also results from the conservative attitudes towards women that persist in many sections of Indian society.

While several family-related problems are common to all working women, journalists have to additionally contend with a profession which regularly requires long and late hours of work as well as unpredictable time schedules. A number of women believe that today, with the introduction of new technologies, conventional patterns of work can be and need to be re-examined. Some point out that journalism already allows for an informal system of flexitime, which can work to women's advantage. However, others suggest that the need for, and feasibility of, more flexibility must be officially acknowledged and formal arrangements put in place which can benefit both men and women, not to mention their families.

The ongoing debate was echoed in a conference on empowering women in the Asian media organized by the International Women's Media Foundation in Manila in June 1998. '... In every encounter at Manila, it was the balancing act of home and career which jumped up, often teetered, but was never commanded to fall,' reported Karkaria. 'Most of us at the conference acknowledged that it was a precarious tightrope, but very few across that varied swathe of culture swore that their experience told them that it had to be either/or. Most believed that, with supportive environments, professional achievement could be enhanced by home fulfilment—and vice versa.'[2]

Discussions on this subject continue elsewhere in the world, too. Joyce Purnick, metropolitan editor of *The New York Times*, kicked up a storm with her May 1998 speech to graduating students at Barnard College. 'There is no way in an all-consuming profession like journalism that a woman with children can devote as much time and energy as a man can,' she is reported to have told the young women. '... if I had left the *Times* to have children, and then come back to work a four-day week the way some women reporters on my staff now do, or if I had taken long vacations and leaves to be with my family, or left the office at six o'clock instead of eight or nine—I wouldn't be the metro editor.'[3]

The controversy over her comments prompted Purnick to explain later that her speech was meant to convey her regret about not having had a family. Julia Wallace, executive editor of the *Statesman Journal*, Oregon, wrote a strong, negative response to Purnick's suggestion that professional success and motherhood are mutually exclusive, according to the Media Report to Women. This is how she concluded: 'As we focussed on bringing women and minorities into management twenty years ago, we need now to make sure we're creating newsrooms where flexibility and understanding rule and where working moms and dads gracefully can balance work and home. Without that, we lose too many good people and too much valuable perspective.'[4]

According to Linda Kelsey, editor of the British magazine, *She*, 'Flexible hours for men and women is the way of the future. ... I don't see any point in men and women driving themselves into the ground for a lifestyle that they're too tired to enjoy, and having no time to spend with their children. We've got to work together to find a new way of working.' But the book in which she is quoted, by fellow journalist Ginny Dougary, makes it clear that the press in the UK has a long way to go before this vision becomes a reality.[5]

An Indian journalist in London reports that there was considerable controversy when one department of the British Broadcasting Corporation introduced a new twelve-hour shift. Ultimately the new shift pattern had to be revised to take motherhood into account. But, significantly, despite the requests of many men, fatherhood was not given the same status. Only women with children were exempted from the new system, she says, 'thus condemning women to the "superwoman" role of mother *and* earner while allowing fathers (or condemning them) to take no responsibility for looking after children.'

Chitra Subramaniam, special correspondent, *The Indian Express*, Geneva, has a more philosophical take on the issue. 'Strangely enough,' she says, 'I feel women are better equipped to cope because, in the process of giving life and sustaining it, we have a very different set of rules for which we fight and for which we live. ... We as women are basically different from men. It is to validate this difference that we struggle. The labour market does not value this difference, and it is reinforced by cultural practices, whether it be in India, in Sweden, in South Africa or in Mexico. The language may be different but the message is the same.

'I have yet to come across a single woman who doesn't feel guilty about leaving her children and going out to work even if home care is available and good. The only conclusion I can draw is that women all over the world are raised with some baggage of guilt. There is enough data to show how cultures, whether they be eastern or western, explicitly subordinate women and how the labour market has picked up from where history left off and how the world—developed and developing—is packed with social-structural arrangements that exclude women from participating in those realms of society where the highest power resides.'

Nevertheless, returning to Parthasarathy's query, perhaps the point is that only a woman would have thought of making such a request. Maybe it could be taken as a plea for a gesture that recognizes the human need for companionship and the social need for members of a family to spend time with each other as well as to take equal responsibility for domestic affairs. Perhaps it was not meant to be a demand for special concession on account of gender. It may be that many men who feel the need to spend more time with their families (by many accounts a growing number) would still be more hesitant about requesting official permission to fulfil it.

If the professional world, in all fields, did recognize that both men and women have personal lives and extra-professional interests and responsibilities, a young journalist like Gayatri would not have to say: ‘I can’t change the world. Has the world around me changed? If the servant comes late, who is going to stay back and wait?’

8

The Enemy Within

> *There are two kinds of gents in this profession: those who are very protective and those who don't take any account of you. Unfortunately, too much protection also works against you.*
>
> Jayshree Desai

Many women in the profession would add a few more negative categories: those who patronize you, those who belittle you, those who gossip about you, those who harass you. ... At the same time, many would also include at least a couple of positive ones: those who encourage you and those who treat you no differently on account of gender.

Virtually across the board, women in journalism seem to agree that if they have encountered any gender-related problems within the profession at all, the majority has been internal rather than external. What is more, journalists at different levels in different organizations in different parts of the country point out that it is colleagues—more than family, society, sources, employers or even top editorial bosses—who have caused them the greatest grief.

Few, in fact, have really unhappy tales to tell about senior editors. Some have, of course, come across the odd black sheep (a few boasting otherwise progressive credentials) whom they dismiss as sexist, chauvinist or just plain misogynist. But far more speak with appreciation and affection of editors who have enabled them to claim their place in the sun, in one way or another.

Significantly, a large number of these editorial heroes are old-timers—many of them no longer alive and others more or less retired, at least from full-time journalism. Most of the others credited with having given a boost to the entry and performance of women in the field are now middle-aged or above, their days of glory generally dating back to the 1980s.

According to many women, if they really wished to carp, they would say that some of the veterans were a little too paternalistic and protective towards them. But quite a few of the old guard seem to have been completely gender-blind long before the term was coined. For instance, according to Sevanti Ninan, her first editor, B.G. Verghese, would think nothing of packing her off to some remote corner of the country for a story. She says she had to occasionally remind him that she might need a little guidance, if not help, in locating suitable accommodation in the hinterland to which he was so blithely sending her.

Seema Mustafa says she prefers editors, like her first, E. Narayanan of *The Patriot*, who do not make any distinctions between journalists on the basis of gender. 'I am suspicious and wary of editors who unnecessarily project women,' she says.

A number of women agree with Desai (above) that protectionism can work to their disadvantage in the profession. As Kusuma Kumari puts it, 'It may seem cosy and comfortable to be pampered and protected but it can also be limiting. You tend to get choked with concern.' Vasanthalakshmi agrees, pointing out that the tendency of male bosses to be paternalistic and indulgent towards women's demands for leave, and so on, also lays the ground for allegations about female journalists and their expectations of special treatment on account of gender.

Some women point out that there are editors, even now, who harbour traditional attitudes towards women's work, particularly in certain fields of journalism. For instance, according to Aditi Kapoor, men in the business bureaux often appear to be more conservative than others, possibly because there have traditionally been fewer women, especially married ones, in that section. 'One business bureau chief I know honestly believes that women should not work once they have children,' she says. Annu Anand claims that the old-fashioned ideas of many editors in the Hindi press today ensure that even dynamic women are not given chances to prove themselves.

On the whole, however, there seems to be a consensus among women that most worthwhile editors have, over the years, recognized women's potential to make valuable contributions to the profession, not only in the traditional 'soft' areas but in a wide range of fields. Some may have been motivated by their generally liberal outlook, incorporating support for the equal treatment—if not 'upliftment'—of 'the weaker sex'. But others may have simply recognized a good journalist when they saw one and used her effectively to improve and promote their publications.

In fact, some of those who probably fit into the latter category reveal ambivalent or inconsistent attitudes towards women. For instance, one editor widely recognized for having identified and nurtured the talents of many now-famous women in the field, is rumoured to be almost Clintonesque in his approach to the female species within and outside the profession.

Another appointed a highly respected woman to a senior position in his publication in the early 1980s—long before other women had reached anywhere near such a post in the newspaper world. But he apparently thought nothing of getting another competent and experienced woman on his staff to cover trivial 'feminine' events (of the flower show variety). And, despite her track record as a serious, capable and talented journalist, he never assigned her to the coveted political beat.

It is this last editor who also refused to act on complaints of sexual harassment by some women on the editorial staff of another paper he headed a few years later. According to one of them, women in the newspaper, particularly those then involved in the activities of the Women and Media Committee of the Mumbai

Union of Journalists, began to receive obscene messages through the computer network at the office. When they brought the matter to the attention of the editor, he refused to take their complaint seriously. Instead, he fobbed them off saying: everyone here is an adult—what can I say or do?

What adulthood has to do with using professional equipment to disseminate offensive messages to colleagues in the workplace, probably during working hours, is anybody's guess. But, as the teller of the tale concludes, 'Maybe women journalists have to be a little insensitive.'

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a sensitive topic which many women are either embarrassed to talk about or prefer to dismiss as a relatively minor irritant that they can handle. They opt not to question why they should have to handle it or to acknowledge the stress involved in dealing with it, let alone the fact that some women may not be equipped to cope with it—especially when they are young. Nevertheless, it is obvious that sexual harassment in the workplace is an occupational hazard that many female journalists have had to deal with in one form or another.

In its mildest and most common form, sexual harassment in the newsroom seems to involve the telling of sexually explicit or otherwise off-colour jokes—not just in the presence of female colleagues but clearly so as to mortify them. Then there is the flaunting of obscene photographs or literature so that women in the office are forced to view them, whether or not they wish to. According to one young journalist in Mumbai, there are reports now of cyber-harassers, who use pornographic sites on the Internet to discomfit female colleagues.

In a recent case in a Bangalore newspaper, however, the jokes went a bit too far even for senior women in the profession who are quite inured to the brand of humour favoured by many male colleagues. Not only were certain women specially targeted but the jokes often culminated in vulgar propositions. Similarly, pornography was not merely left around for passing women to see but a particularly tasteless book was specifically passed on to a selected woman.

There were also reports of obscene telephone calls to women on the night shift. One staffer received a highly offensive anonymous letter believed to have emanated from the same source. The rumour that persistent indecent proposals caused another woman to quit her job is not too incredible in view of the high position occupied by the alleged harasser (who, fortunately, is no longer at his post).

Unsolicited personal remarks about female colleagues and their looks, attire, and so on, are almost universally accepted as par for the course. But a young journalist in Hyderabad thinks it is important to 'react strongly' even to seemingly innocuous 'comments on the colour of your clothes, the shape of your bindi (traditional cosmetic mark on the forehead), etc., so that they realize they can't fool around with you. I just tell them to shut up, that it is none of their business. I had to do a lot of this in the first year to establish myself and to make sure that I am not taken lightly.'

Her aggressive reaction may be an understandable response to the more explicit sexual harassment she experienced early in her career. According to her, the problem is that some men misconstrue ordinary, normal friendliness and think they can take advantage of any woman who happens to be sociable. Fortunately and unusually, her boss took action and her tormentor was fired. Now, she says, she prefers to be seen as a snob rather than risk such misunderstanding.

A senior woman journalist in Calcutta says young women on the staff of the Bengali newspaper she works with complain to her of harassment by their immediate 'superiors'. These men ostentatiously examine and discuss pictures of 'scantily clad women' and make unnecessary, graphic comments about passing women in the presence of these juniors. 'Maybe they are trying to demonstrate that they are socially forward and not conservative. But, in the process, they are only showing poor taste and indulging in distasteful behaviour,' she says. One of the young journalists subjected to this treatment describes it as 'mild harassment' but admits that she finds it humiliating.

Cheap Thrills

According to Annu Anand, many male journalists working in the Hindi press continue to be narrow-minded and conservative. This, she says, is reflected in the way they deal with women at the workplace: 'For example, they start loudly discussing the *Kama Sutra* when a young girl comes into the office—just to embarrass her. Female freelancers are told to keep coming to the office and meeting them—"*aathe rehe, milthe rehe.*" They seem to get a thrill out of having women sitting in front of their desks. They obviously enjoy wielding power over them—both personal and professional. Of course, they do this to all aspiring journalists but young women are harassed even more than young men.'

A woman working with a Hindi newspaper in Delhi says she gave up wearing jeans and trousers because of the lewd looks she encountered in her office in the capital. Ironically, the same clothes had not caused a problem in the smaller city where she began her career, located in a state where the status of women is otherwise appalling. At one point, in a clear attempt to humiliate her, an article she had written was pinned up on the notice board surrounded by obscene pictures.

According to her, as part of the 'fun' during the festival of Holi, staff members on the paper are traditionally given inhouse titles, usually related in some way to personal characteristics. In her first year there, her title was '*ek chaader maili si,*' which implies sexual promiscuity. She reacted strongly: 'I openly told the people here that if something like that ever happened again I would see the colour of their underwear.' (This is obviously a translation of a popular threat to expose them by pulling off their pants.)

A news agency in Mumbai harboured a news editor who was not only alcoholic but obviously had sex rather than the day's events on his mind. One journalist who had the misfortune of working with him in the 1980s says he used to routinely ask women on the staff who they were sleeping with. When she first joined the agency and found that women were not assigned to the night shift, she expressed her willingness to do night duty. His response: 'So you don't mind being raped?' According to her, many men in the profession find it difficult to deal with women who do not fit into their traditional image of womanhood: 'If you smoke or drink they assume you are "easy", if you go out with them they think you will sleep with them.'

Another woman who worked in the agency during that period says the news editor's behaviour with her bordered on sexual harassment. However, she chose not to make a fuss because she felt the abuse was not unbearable enough for her to risk jeopardizing her career. On the other hand, she found the behaviour of the agency's chief of bureau too offensive to ignore:

'He suggested that I do a story on the pornographic literature available on the pavements. He could have asked any of the men on the staff to do it. But he deliberately chose me. I tried to avoid the assignment, saying it was not the type of story the agency normally did. But he was determined. He passed on to me his collection of pornographic limericks. I locked them up. He sent me a memo (official reprimand) for not doing the story and asked me to return the "research material".'

He persisted with other types of harassment, too: 'Once, overhearing a conversation I was having with colleagues about not receiving calls in the office, he passed me a note saying, "You were talking about calls—are you a call girl?" I went up to him and said: "You have a fifteen-year-old daughter. Don't behave like this." Ultimately I sent him a semi-legal notice, got the head office of the agency involved, and so on. But he is still around and I'm told he continues to harass others, including men on the staff and the office secretary.'

A journalist in Ahmedabad talks about an editor who tried to trap her into a sexual relationship at the very beginning of her career in the mid-1970s: 'He tapped my telephone calls, read all my letters, including those from my father, objected to my interactions with male colleagues, and so on.' As a result she unwittingly got embroiled in office politics and was eventually compelled to leave the organization (although she managed to get herself reinstated later).

According to a senior woman journalist in Bangalore, part of the problem is the socio-cultural mismatch between the bulk of the men and most of the women in the profession. For instance, many women in journalism come from backgrounds where social interaction between the sexes is relatively common and where women enjoy some latitude in social behaviour. On the other hand, a large number of male journalists belong to more conservative sections of society, where even the husband-wife relationship tends to be limited by social norms.

As a result, she says, many of these men do not know quite how to relate to female colleagues who seem radically different from the women in their own families and social circles. According to her, in their minds, a woman who smokes and/or drinks and/or chats freely with men is akin to a prostitute. And they assume they can behave as they wish with them.

Unwanted Advances

Be that as it may, one of the most prolonged and serious cases of sexual harassment that I have come across took place in Calcutta in the 1980s. Again, an alcoholic news editor was the prime culprit. The victim in this case was a young journalist who had just joined the paper. He managed to make her life miserable for several years, constantly asking her to sit in front of him, complaining that she was not smiling at him and generally indulging in offensive behaviour towards her. 'I was able to keep my sanity only because I had so much else in my life,' she says.

But finally it all got too much. 'One night, he arrived late and drunk at the office, snapped his fingers at me and said, "Come here." I walked up to his desk, not knowing what else to do. He said something that I couldn't really understand. Everybody in the office could see what was happening—in any case everyone knew how he had been behaving—but nobody said anything. It was very humiliating. Then he snapped his fingers again and something snapped in me. "This is not a bar," I told him. "Why don't you behave yourself?" He shouted at me, I shouted back. I knew my job was on the line but by this time I didn't care.

'I wrote a passionate, angry letter to the editor, complaining about the continuing harassment. The management said they would look into it and make sure it didn't happen again. He was sent for detoxification but eventually came back and the situation was still unpleasant. I seriously thought of quitting.'

According to her, what was most amazing was how tolerant the management was of his atrocious behaviour through the years. Once he was so drunk that he defecated in the room where the airconditioning unit was located, presumably mistaking it for the toilet. Thanks to the vents, the whole office was reeking! Another aspect of the experience that upset her was the indifference or at least inaction of her colleagues. Their indignation, when finally expressed, was based on parochial considerations—a Bengali girl being ill-treated by a non-Bengali—which she found quite irrelevant.

As if this were not bad enough, she had another unpleasant experience, when an inebriated colleague—who happened to be close to the obnoxious news editor—tried to molest her in the car dropping editorial staff back home after night duty. According to her, another (male) colleague was sitting in the front seat but did not bother to intervene. He later tried to push the responsibility onto her by asking, 'Why did you allow him in the car?' Once again, the management did not take her complaint seriously: the offending man was shunted out of the department for a while but was reinstated after he apologized.

Indifferent Managements

Clearly, on the few occasions when women have actually mustered up the courage and determination to risk lodging complaints of sexual harassment, editors and managements have, by and large, been reluctant to take the necessary action. The general tendency seems to be to treat such episodes with less seriousness than they deserve, probably to avoid shaking the editorial boat.

In 1997, the Supreme Court of India clearly defined sexual harassment in all its forms and put the onus on the managements of organizations to ensure that both male and female employees are aware of their rights and responsibilities in this regard. More recently, the apex court expanded the scope of its earlier definition and affirmed that sexual harassment is a violation of the fundamental rights to equality as well as life and liberty. Both judgments have been widely reported and analysed in the press. From the experiences of several women in the field, it is clear that media establishments, too, need to put their own houses in order, in accordance with the judgment.

A number of women have experienced other forms of gender-related harassment within newspaper organizations. One of the worst and most prolonged instances is that of a woman in Mumbai who was taken into the organization through its training scheme and posted to its Marathi daily, then and for many years edited by a well-known journalist who did not approve of women entering the field.

Annoyed that she was employed against his will, he did not speak to her, the only female member of his editorial staff, for a whole year, according to the woman concerned. Thanks to the news editor and chief reporter of the paper, who were obviously more progressive, she was able to write many articles, which attracted public attention. The editor retaliated by putting a ban on bylines in the paper. At one point he also tried to implicate her in false cases that raised questions about her professional integrity.

'Character assassination is usually the best way to destroy a woman,' she points out. 'In my case it didn't take a sexual tone, probably because I got married quite early to a highly respected fellow journalist. But that editor really tried to kill my spirit in every way. Fortunately, he didn't succeed. He had a bias against women in general and me in particular. In a newspaper, the editor is all in all—so much depends on your relationship and equation with him.' She had to work under this hostile editor for twenty-six years.

Another woman, now working in a Hindi newspaper in Delhi, began to face problems in her career only after she moved to the capital. In her home state of Rajasthan, she began writing on international affairs for a local newspaper while she was a postgraduate student of political science. Later, as a district correspondent of a state-level newspaper published from Jaipur, she covered a variety of beats, including politics and crime. During her five years with the paper, she also worked on the news desk, where she was sometimes responsible for bringing out the edition.

Professional Demotion

She then moved to a job in a well-known Hindi daily published by a major newspaper group and was posted to Chandigarh. There she opted to work on the desk (mainly to placate conservative relatives in the city) and was often in charge of bringing out the local edition. Her performance apparently earned her a reputation as a good, hardworking journalist. Despite this and her years of experience, when she was transferred to the head office in Delhi some time later, she was given the lowly designation of sub-editor. This put her on a par with the junior-most journalists on the editorial staff. To make matters worse, her colleagues refused to give her any work.

'In Chandigarh, I was bringing out a whole edition. Here I'm not even given pages to make. When there is absolutely no one else around, I am sometimes told to handle the dak (outstation) edition, but never the city edition. The news editor would rather handle it himself than hand it over to me. I have never been told why I am subjected to such treatment. They put the blame on the editor but he says it is their doing. Instead of doing something about it, he tries to deflect the issue and says, "Why do you want to be bothered with the edition? You are interested in reporting. Why don't you concentrate on writing?" At the same time, he won't make me a full-fledged reporter. So I have fallen between two stools.'

Her writing also became a bone of contention: 'One colleague actually said he would not take copy from a girl. Whenever I wrote a report, I found it on the notice board the next day, marked with unnecessary corrections.' In addition, her colleagues complained that she was more interested in reporting and used this as justification for not giving her work on the desk.

'But how could I sit around doing nothing at all?' she asks. 'Only my love for my work and my power of resistance have kept me going. I try to ignore my colleagues and their attitudes and behaviour. But I have to struggle all the time and, career-wise, I have definitely been damaged.' According to her, with the paper's own future now uncertain and everyone on the staff feeling insecure about their jobs, her colleagues' behaviour towards her has improved in recent times. 'But,' she says, 'at this stage it has no meaning.'

Personal Vendetta

In some cases, the harassment is not directly related to the gender of the victim but it still has a gender-specific impact. For instance, a young journalist from Ahmedabad tells of a superior who harassed her over a fairly long period. She says he made her work extra long hours, sending her on vague assignments early in the morning and insisting on her handling inconsequential press notes till midnight. At the same time, he showered favours on a female colleague with whom he was romantically involved.

'I had to leave the working women's hostel I was living in because of the continuous late hours he made me work,' she says. 'He also sent me to cover the communal riots in the city on my own and without any transport, although the other woman was given a vehicle for her work. This sometimes meant I had to walk over eight kilometres, one way, during curfew hours.'

It was only after this kind of treatment had gone on for over three and a half years that the management finally took action against the man and transferred him. Although he challenged the action in court, he ultimately left, along with the woman he 'openly acknowledged as his weakness'. According to her, since then the organization has become more sensitive to such harassment at work.

Sometimes harassment results from a number of prejudices working together. One woman, who worked for a short period with a newspaper in Nagpur, describes the experience as terrible because of the deliberate victimization she feels she was subjected to. Although she is not a native of Maharashtra, she was given only Marathi translations to do. She was also perpetually assigned to the evening shift. Apart from her gender, she says, the fact that she was not a 'local' and was perceived to be a 'rich socialite' contributed to her colleagues' animosity towards her.

Occasionally, sheer personal vendetta seems to lead to professional harassment. According to one journalist from

Vishakapatnam, her troubles began after she dared to question the news editor of her paper about the mishandling of some of her reports. It is not clear whether he was particularly incensed that a woman had had the temerity to question him. In any case, she says, ‘He was determined to take revenge on me. I was asked to resign from the paper on the grounds that I was involved with a women’s group. When I refused, I was given no work to do. After some time I was transferred to the desk and then to Calcutta, where the paper does not even have an office. Finally my services were terminated.’ Her case is still pending in the local industrial court.

A few other women, too, have been bold enough to legally challenge unjust professional practices. A woman in Ahmedabad whose problems began after the editor tried to sexually harass her also took the issue of her unfair dismissal to the labour court. She even won the case after many years. But because she was reluctantly reinstated without back wages or continuity in service, she remained a junior reporter, while people who joined the profession after her became special correspondents, chief reporters, deputy news editors, and so on. She recently left to join another paper and is finally in a better position than she has been in for a long time.

Uneasy Relations

Even when such outright harassment and discrimination do not exist, relationships between male and female colleagues in the press are not always easy. In the early days, most male colleagues were obviously comfortable in their big brotherly or avuncular roles, probably assuming that the few women coming in would not stick around long enough to make a nuisance of themselves.

Before long, however, it became clear that women were in the profession to stay. And, as they began to demonstrate their seriousness and staying power, to encroach on territory hitherto assumed to be exclusively male, and to grow not only in number but also in stature and confidence, indulgence often gave way to resentment and more aggressive efforts to put and keep them down.

Many journalists who were the first and often only women on the premises of their publications found that male colleagues either did not know how to deal with them or went out of their way to help them. For instance, when Usha Rai joined *The Times of India*, Delhi, in the mid-1960s, she was the only woman on the editorial staff of the paper. The only other women in the office were a journalist colleague at the *Navbharat Times* and three telephone operators. But, she says, 'My colleagues were warm, friendly and eager to help.' Similarly, Gita Aravamudan was the only woman in the entire building of *The Indian Express*, Bangalore, in the late 1960s but found comfort in the family-like atmosphere. Some male colleagues even made informal arrangements for her to be dropped home at night (sometimes in a van transporting dak editions of the paper!).

But nearly ten years later, when Seema Mustafa joined *The Patriot* in Delhi and became the only woman in the entire establishment, her experience was not quite so pleasant. 'They had a difficult time adjusting to me,' she says.

S Urmila Majumdar's description of the evolving attitudes of male colleagues towards her is revealing. 'When I became the first woman journalist to join the paper in 1980, my colleagues treated me like a younger sister, with affection and support,' she says. 'But it was clear that they didn't think much of me as a journalist and didn't really see journalism as a field for women. In other words, they were both affectionate and dismissive. This was not just because of my gender but because I was English-speaking, which is generally taken to mean that you don't really know Bengali—and that definitely confirms that you are feeble-minded! A strong streak of chauvinism was evident but it didn't result in any harassment. Things were all right as long as I was on my own.'

But now, she says, with more women on the staff, getting friendly and chatting with each other, the men in the office seem to be feeling more threatened: 'Obviously, male camaraderie is all right but not female bonding! I notice that they quickly distribute copy to break up the party!'

According to Rajashri Dasgupta, in the early 1980s, when she and a few other women joined the *Business Standard* in Calcutta, the men on the desk were so embarrassed by their presence that they would avoid looking at them: 'If we talked to them even about routine, work-related matters, they would blush. They were simply not used to interacting with women at the workplace. We belonged to a different social background and initially couldn't understand their reaction.' According to her as well as many others in the profession in Calcutta, even now women who fit the traditional image of a 'good Bengali girl'—dressed in a *sari*, with long hair, a *bindi*, and so on—find it easier to win support from male colleagues.

Generation Gap

Parvathy Devi R makes an interesting point when she suggests that, in many ways, it is easier to deal with the older generation of male journalists. According to her, the younger generation seems to harbour much worse attitudes, especially in terms of gender. She points out that, even in her paper, it is possible to discuss anything with the editor, who is in his 60s, and quite a few things with the news editor, who is middle-aged, but it is difficult to discuss anything at all with the young men in the field. She thinks this may be because they are products of the modern consumer culture and all that it implies for the image of women. According to her, if many young girls in Kerala today are timid and afraid of speaking up, it is at least partly because of the attitudes of their male contemporaries.

Some women suggest that the resistance to women entering the newsroom frequently has to do with the assumption that the atmosphere would necessarily have to change. According to Rasheeda Bhagat, she was not accepted by male colleagues when she became the first woman to join the reporting section of *The Indian Express* in Chennai. This was partly because she could not be part of the back-slapping and bawdy jokes trading environment of the typical newsroom. Usha Ram Manohar, the first and only woman in the Press Trust of India in Kochi, also says, 'Men here do feel they can't be as free as they were before I came in. They think they have to be careful about what they say, how they behave, and so on.'

On the other hand, some female journalists are pleased with the idea that they have improved the atmosphere in the newsroom. As Lata Raje points out, 'Thanks to women's presence, men feel a bit more inhibited about cracking bawdy jokes and the language they use is a little more restrained. On the whole, the culture of the newsroom is a little more refined now. So I am glad we are here.'

However, others report that women's goody-goody image sometimes prevents them from gaining acceptance among fellow professionals. For example, says Sandhya Nare Pawar, the few women covering the state government and legislative assembly are often left out of the groups which operate in the *Mantralaya* (Secretariat), especially if they don't play by the set rules: 'If you are too earnest it makes them feel uncomfortable.'

She cites another example. She was once the only woman member of a press party taken to visit a development project in a rural area. As soon as they reached their destination she wanted to set off to the site of the dam, talk to villagers, etc. Her enthusiasm gave rise to some awkwardness because most of the other journalists were keen to first relax and unwind by spending the afternoon smoking and drinking in the hotel. According to her, they made sarcastic comments about the new bride having to dress well, and so on, implying that her eagerness had to do with her inexperience.

Constant Irritants

For many women, one of the most irritating aspects of male colleagues' attitudes and behaviour is their tendency to take them lightly and to assume, or at least pretend, that they are of little account. For example, when Navata joined a Telugu paper as a reporter in 1991, she found that some senior journalists from other newspapers were unwilling to even acknowledge her as a fellow reporter. According to her, they would even go so far as to interrupt when she asked a question at a press conference.

Many women have had to put up with being repeatedly told that they would not be able to manage such a tough profession along with their family responsibilities. Says Shikha Mukherjee, 'In my experience, gender has always been more of an issue with my colleagues than with my employers. For instance, when I got married they kept saying: perhaps you won't have the time, maybe you'll lose interest. Then, when I had a baby, they tried telling me that I would now be a different person and that my profession would necessarily take a back seat. They had obviously never heard of the balancing act women routinely perform.'

Bhagat also says there was considerable resistance to her when she became the first woman reporter in Chennai: 'They really tried to push me into the desk, redoubling their efforts while I was pregnant. After my maternity leave, there were definite attempts to get rid of me, with even the resident editor suggesting that I would not be able to concentrate on my work. Basically, they were not very happy about the fact that I was able to break stories. The resentment was not just because I was a woman but because I was also "different".'

Quite a few women, even today, even in cities like Mumbai and Delhi, say that such attitudes have not entirely disappeared, especially in fields women have only recently entered. For instance, photojournalist Savita Kirloskar says fellow professionals—both journalists and photographers—do not take her seriously. 'Press photographers tend to think they belong to an all-male club. Most of them believe this profession is for the tough guys. In fact, there is a general feeling that all forms of photography are somehow a male preserve. It is assumed that you landed the job by charming someone. If you are female the natural ammunition is your personal life.'

Sharda Ugra points out that, by and large, sports is also still seen as a male pursuit. As a corollary, sports journalism is presumed to be male territory. When she first joined the field ten years ago, she found that 'older colleagues either patronized you or pretended you were not there.' Although she did not encounter any outright hostility, she did recognize that they were waiting to see whether the phenomenon of a female sports reporter was just another form of groupie-ism: 'They wanted to see whether I was really there for the work.' However, she says, the new lot of male sports journalists show no such resistance: 'They tend to accept that you are there, just like they are, to do a job.'

However, another journalist working on the sports desk of a newspaper in Calcutta believes that 'It is going to take a century before men realize that women can do it ... They still seem to think that women are too stupid to know that there are two ends to a wicket and eleven players on each side. Until it is accepted that we also know what we are talking and writing about, we won't be able to cover sports the way we want to.'

Shrabani Basu, special correspondent, the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* group, London, says she faced some condescension from fellow Indian journalists when she first began working in London in the late 1980s. According to her, the established Indian foreign correspondents there—all older men—were initially arrogant and patronising in their attitudes to her, a twenty-five-year-old woman who was then freelancing. She says they began to take her more seriously after her first big-story from London: the very first interview given by author Salman Rushdie to an Indian publication after he had gone into hiding following Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa against him for writing *Satanic Verses*.

R. Akhileshwari, who served as Washington-based foreign correspondent for the *Deccan Herald* for a few years, also reports condescension and exclusion from Indian male colleagues abroad. According to her, they operated as a kind of club, sharing information and stories, but were clearly averse to letting her into their cosy circle.

Today, however, gender relations among Indian foreign correspondents in London seem to have eased up considerably. According to Anjali Mody, special correspondent, *The Indian Express*, London, although there are only a few women in the Indian press corps in the UK and many of the men are still considerably older than them, they are all able to relate on a relatively easy, equal footing.

Confident Women

S. Subha suggests that it is the combination of gender and character type that some male colleagues cannot stomach. She gave up her job recently 'because of an individual who could not digest the fact that a woman could be successful.' According to her, the same person was very encouraging at the beginning of her career but, as she rose in the organization, she began to face hostility and criticism from him. 'The opposition to me was both personal and professional,' she says. 'And it was not only because I was a woman but because I was fearless and forthright, with a tendency to call a spade a spade. They don't like questioning, rebellious women. Those who are more timid and submissive may get by.'

Bindu Bhaskar agrees that people who question things find the going tougher than others. She thinks many women in the profession—especially those who share a certain type of family and social background—tend to be more vocal and vociferous than their male counterparts, who are often more conformist. This makes them all the more unpopular with their male colleagues, she claims.

According to Parvathi Menon, some male colleagues tend to see confident women as arrogant, opinionated and over-ambitious. They speak disparagingly about 'activist' women in the profession. After a spirited argument over a current issue, one of them apparently told her that she was blinkered by her political views (he, of course, was not!). 'I got the feeling that his irritation with my "blinkered views" had less to do with my politics and more to do with my being a woman,' she says.

A number of women put much of the bad blood between male and female colleagues down to professional jealousy, which seems to become particularly unbearable when the successful colleague is a woman. According to Kalpana Sharma, 'Initially everyone is very helpful but when you prove that you are good or even better you often encounter outright hostility.'

Ranee Kumar, senior sub-editor, *The Indian Express*, Hyderabad, says she learnt an important lesson early on, while working with the *Deccan Chronicle*. 'When you are raw they don't mind you. But once you become confident they take it as haughtiness and don't like it.' She says she began to face resentment and harassment from colleagues once she began to be recognized for her writing and earned a quick promotion: 'At one point I was made to handle three pages single-handedly. You have to fight your way through as a woman, constantly proving yourself. At the same time you can't afford to cross swords with anybody.'

As a young journalist working in a Bengali newspaper in Calcutta points out, there is a general 'assumption that males are better and will do better than females; so, if a woman reporter does better than her male colleagues, she faces pungent remarks.' According to her, while some colleagues are no doubt helpful, far more have 'the wrong type of attitude'. Anita Rao Kashi suggests that many male colleagues do not know quite how to handle the fact that women in the profession today are doing so well and making such an impact: 'They seem quite insecure about it. They find it difficult to tolerate women being as successful as they are or even more so.'

Jyoti Shukla says her skirmishes with some senior colleagues were mainly due to their resentment over a newcomer doing so much work. She does not attribute their attitude to her gender. However, many other women believe they are the targets of more professional jealousy than their male counterparts because men are somehow more unwilling to recognize and appreciate women's achievements.

According to Prema Vishwanathan, while Mumbai is fairly professional, the attitudes of male colleagues in Delhi leave much to be desired. Whether the root of their problem is envy, insecurity or just plain overblown egos, she says, the fact is that they are only too ready to discount women's work.

'There has generally been a tendency among women journalists to stretch themselves a little more than their male colleagues—possibly to "prove themselves", she says. 'But their conscientiousness is often dismissed as "acquiescence" to the system. And some of the more execrable male colleagues I know tend to attribute any recognition of a female colleague's merit to "feminine wiles". There are, undoubtedly, some males in positions of authority who do respond to such 'wiles', she says, 'but I would like to think these are more the exception than the rule, and most editors would like the best person—man or woman—for the job.'

Petty Minds

Many male colleagues have petty minds, states Sudha Tilak. So, 'When a woman breaks a story, she receives no congratulations for her good work. Instead, they dismiss her achievement by implying that she got the source to talk only because of her looks.' In contrast, she says, there is much back-slapping and celebration when a man does well.

According to Kusuma Kumari, she got little credit for a major story she broke in *Kala Kaumudi* about the terrible conditions in a local mental hospital, which she happened to witness while covering Mother Teresa's visit to the institution. Her exposé caused a flurry in the state and became a big issue in the legislative assembly. Although it was a scoop for the publication, nobody on the staff bothered to tell her the story was good. In fact, she did not even get a byline for it.

Two and a half years later, the *Malayala Manorama* carried a similar story which received national attention. It was only then that her publication not only published an edit laying claim to her scoop but even promoted her as its author. 'But it was too late,' she points out.

Even Tavleen Singh has stories about being taken less than seriously, especially at the beginning of her career. For instance, she says, she was probably the first journalist to report that the Coca Cola corporation was going to be thrown out of India in the late 1970s. She had come across the sensational story quite by chance when she had gone to interview the then minister for industries, who was responsible for the move. Although this was potentially a page one story, her paper buried it on page three. The minister's announcement of his controversial decision at a public meeting the next day was, of course, splashed on the front pages of all newspapers. Even now she is not sure whether the paper downplayed her scoop because she was a woman or because she was young and relatively junior.

Annu Anand points out that men seem to find it difficult to accept that a woman can be competent. For example, she says, when she and a male colleague worked on a story together and took joint bylines, it was clear that everyone assumed that the man had done all the work.

Similarly, Sucheta Dalal says many people in the profession were unwilling to acknowledge that she had scooped the story of the stock market scam involving Harshad Mehta. According to her, despite the fact that she was the first woman to cover the stock market and had been breaking new ground on that beat for several years, the question doing the rounds suddenly was, 'Who is this Sucheta Dalal?' Just because she shared the byline on the very first scam story with a male colleague, people were only too ready to give the entire credit for the scoop to him. According to her, the doubts persisted for a while, although she continued to file an average of three stories a day on the complicated financial scandal for the next two years, most of them exclusives. Eventually she co-authored a book on the subject.

Meena Menon agrees that there is latent male hostility towards women in the profession even today. She points out that even when there is no open animosity there is often an undercurrent of resentment. While she attributes some of this to colleagues feeling threatened, she believes that some of the bad feeling is also caused by women who take advantage of gender, make excuses for themselves and don't work as hard as they should.

Renuka Puri tends to agree that colleagues may not be entirely wrong when they allege that girls have all the benefits. 'I get angry when they say such things but sometimes I feel they may be right. Perhaps it is a waste to hire women when they are not always in a position to give their jobs number one priority. I can understand why men prefer to have more male colleagues. It is unfair but, considering the reality, I can't always blame them for feeling that way.'

No Excuses

However, few are willing to make such excuses for the negative attitudes of male colleagues. According to Pawar, much of the resentment about women not pulling their weight is unfounded. For example, she says, colleagues make uncalled for remarks if you go home early, even though you have finished your work for the day.

During the period when she had to breastfeed her baby, her editor allowed her to leave early, but she took work home and didn't reduce her work load. Sometimes, she says, she didn't get any sleep at all. Many colleagues were still resentful. Although she offered to take leave without pay, the editor preferred this arrangement because it meant she could still do her quota of work. Pawar acknowledges that resentment may be natural under such circumstances but points out, 'They don't seem to recognize the fact that this is a short, temporary period in a woman's life that she can't easily avoid.'

At the same time, she says, they don't bother to ackowledge your efforts when you manage to do something against all the odds. For instance, she single-handedly covered a two-day, weekend political rally soon after her baby was born. Since the edition was being held back just to accommodate her story, she went straight from the rally to the office to write up the piece. 'I was still weak from the delivery and the continuing bleeding. Since I was unable to breastfeed through the day, the milk was oozing out. I don't know how I completed the article, but I did,' she says proudly.

But, according to her, none of her colleagues took much note of the professionalism she had demonstrated even under such trying circumstances. Interestingly, the rally was covered by three men from the Gujarati edition of *Chitralekha*. Not only did they take several days to complete their story but the sister publication chose to reproduce her article in translation.

Promotions seem to bring on fresh waves of resentment. A woman working in a major newspaper in Chennai claims that her male colleagues totally ignored her promotion to the post of assistant editor after several years on the job. 'None of the men in the office took it well,' she says. 'Nobody bothered to congratulate me.'

Some managements seem to pander to male insecurities about women's professional advancement. According to Annam Suresh, when she was working at *The Northeast Times* in Guwahati, she was designated deputy news editor even though the paper had neither a news editor nor an editor—just so as not to upset the men on the staff.

Although both men and women rise faster in the profession now than earlier, women's quick progress still seems to cause more problems. Sanchita Das, who was made chief reporter in a financial daily within a few years of entering the field, found that the task of heading a bureau of five journalists, including two other women, was made difficult by her colleagues' attitudes.

She is not sure whether it was her gender or her age that went against her, but she felt vulnerable. 'I was pushed into the situation and, although I was secure about knowing my job, I faced a lot of antagonism,' she says. 'I tried to take it coolly but it was scary. I just tried to stay low key and keep things going.' Eventually, the team settled down but the problems with her immediate boss continued and she eventually moved to another publication.

Resentment and Mutiny

Many women agree that problems with male colleagues tend to increase in direct proportion to their success in the profession. Singh admits that many male journalists seemed quite unhappy when she began to write a political column in *The Indian Express* in the late 1980s. According to her, despite her track record as a political reporter, she was, at least initially, dismissed as a cocktail party journalist, possibly because her column was written in a chatty rather than ponderous style. Although there are many men who really are cocktail party journalists, she points out, they do not seem to be singled out for such disparaging comments.

It is perhaps only to be expected that as women climb up the organizational ladder, they face increasing opposition, including mutiny. When Bhagat became the first woman chief reporter of *The Indian Express*, Chennai, in the early 1990s, she was the first woman to reach such a post in the city and, indeed, in the whole of the south. This milestone led to a major revolt among the reporters in the *Express*. Many of them, including a woman, left the paper. 'The first six months were traumatic,' she says. 'I felt that if I failed it would not only be an individual failure but failure as a woman.' She did not fail. Instead, she recruited a new team and remained in the post for five years, before moving on to her current job at *Business Line*.

A few years later, when K. Jayanthi was appointed deputy news editor of the *Express* in Chennai, she found that hostility can sometimes escalate into deliberate and serious attempts at sabotage. According to her, some colleagues went to the extent of trying to delay the edition when she was in charge. She eventually left the paper to join *Frontline* as assistant editor.

A.T. Jayanthi faced a similar situation when she took over as resident editor of the *Deccan Chronicle* in Hyderabad a few years ago: twenty sub-editors quit within a month of her joining. Before they left, however, they tried to create several problems for her—even going so far as to try and get a page filled with news that was a month old past her. Luckily for her, the hands-on experience she had gained with *The Asian Age* in Mumbai helped her to cope. But she had to go through the difficult and tedious process of hiring fresh staff, training them, and so on.

According to Dalal, 'Even now some men do have a problem with a woman boss. One young man on my team asked me about my qualifications for the job. An older man deliberately underplayed important stories in an effort to show me up. They know what happens in many other papers—so many senior male journalists swipe stories or take bylines for stories done by their juniors. They know none of that happens here. I try hard to be nice but some of them are still not happy.'

Some women who have faced opposition from male colleagues are not sure whether gender or other factors were responsible for their problems. According to Jyoti Punwani, when she became acting chief reporter of *The Indian Post* in Mumbai in the late 1980s, reporters at the paper refused to cooperate with her. She is not sure whether this happened because she was a woman or because she was a relative newcomer in the organization.

Similarly, Gouri Chatterjee is quite ambivalent about the factors that led to her departure from the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* after becoming its news editor and one of the first women to reach that position anywhere in the country. Although many other women in the city see the episode as an example of male backlash, she herself is not so sure and, in fact, puts much of the blame on her own personality and priorities.

According to her, 'Newspapers have their own demands and conventions. You have to work within that framework, managing people who have been doing things in a certain way for a long time and want to continue doing them that way.' She admits that the staff was largely male and traditional, with even the youngsters thinking much the way the old guard did. 'I wanted to introduce more national and international news. That didn't make me very popular—I was accused of trying to make *ABP* into *The Times of India, The New York Times*, etc. I guess their discomfort also had to do with the fact that I was not from their class and cultural background. I was an outsider in every sense.'

She believes the main problem was that she 'didn't have the personality to carry the whole thing through.' She thinks she lacked the leadership qualities required to take people along with her. At the same time, she says, she got the feeling that the management was also uneasy with the status quo being disturbed. Finally, it all got too much and she opted to leave. 'I really can't say whether it happened because I was a woman. I suspect it was more of a cultural thing—we just didn't gel culturally. I also think it had something to do with my own lack of confidence. I began to feel that I was not on top of things and not in control of the situation—I had never felt that way before.'

Shikha Mukherjee believes Chatterjee is unnecessarily taking the blame for what happened on herself. 'She is a very competent journalist,' she says. 'But she just couldn't take all that pressure from all those men.' She suggests that some of the issues that have been worked out in cities like Delhi and Mumbai 'with far less personal rancour and tension' are still alive in Calcutta.

For instance, just a few years ago, there was a great deal of resentment and a virtual revolt when she was made Calcutta bureau chief of the *TOI*. Except for one person, who had been coordinating things but was not given the designation because he was on the verge of retirement, the rest of the staff were her juniors—in the profession if not in age. 'Gender, not competence, was the issue,' she says.

The management's response was also bizarre. In order to defuse the crisis, they arrived at a ridiculous compromise. This meant, in effect, that while she kept the designation, none of the correspondents would be reporting to her. 'I was categorically told to handle things very gently because the people concerned were older than me and felt uncomfortable about working under me. They were told that I was merely a kind of point-person and not really the bureau chief. It was an untenable situation. I would be held responsible for mistakes made by people I had no control over. I told the editors that if I couldn't function as a proper bureau chief I would rather be sent somewhere else.'

A few women have managed to deal with the situation by directly confronting negative attitudes whenever they have come across them. For example, according to Carol Andrade, 'I have had lots of men working for me but haven't faced any problems. If they seem to question my authority I simply tell them, "If you were better at my job than I am, you would have it"'

Character Assassination

A large number of women in some parts of the country mention that they have had to contend with a great deal of unnecessary gossip and insinuation in the course of their careers. The provocations are so varied that they seem quite unpredictable.

According to Arundhati Mukherjee, a couple of colleagues have tried to put spokes to her wheel through rumours and character assassination, the customary weapons used against women. She claims that they once went so far as to use a bomb hoax to delay a flight she was to take to Delhi for an important interview.

'If women push themselves to achieve success, they are considered "fast" and there is a lot of talk about their using feminine charms, fluttering their eye-lashes, etc., to get ahead,' points out one journalist in Hyderabad. Similarly, a journalist in Kerala says that if a woman is vocal and active, she is described as 'over-smart'.

Another person working in the state suggests that if a woman gets 'too friendly' with colleagues—that is, if she talks to men in the office, goes to the canteen with them or takes a lift with one of them on his scooter—the gossip generated is likely to go up to 'higher authorities'!

According to an early bird in the field in Kerala, traditional male-female roles tend to get extended to the work place: 'As the only woman journalist in my office, my friends were the typists, etc., who were the only other females there. It was not easy to make friends with fellow journalists of the other sex. They were so anxious to protect their image and reputation that they wouldn't even accompany me to the canteen. If you don't go along with the limitations imposed by society here, you are labelled a rebel.'

A young Kerala-based journalist talks about the fuss that was kicked up just because she stayed on in the office till about 10.30 p.m. in order to finish a story. 'The fact that there was a girl in the office at night became a big issue. They seem to have been afraid of something even though I wasn't.' Similarly, she says, all sorts of rumours were circulated about her because she once interviewd a literary figure in a hotel: 'I saw it as part of my work, but I had to face all sorts of questions about why I had met him there.'

One of the worst instances of organized gossip and innuendo took place in Lucknow a few years ago. According to Radhika Ramaseshan, who was then working out of the state capital, the special Diwali edition of a publication brought out by the

Lucknow Union of Journalists was customarily both sexy and sexist. That particular year it contained nasty references to women journalists, complete with vulgar illustrations, allegations of a relationship between one woman journalist and her immediate boss, and so on.

For the first time, all the women journalists in Lucknow got together and decided to take up the matter. They created quite a furore and even *gheraoed* (demonstrated against) the perpetrators on the premises of the legislative assembly. According to Ramaseshan, when the men responded by becoming vicious and abusive, some of the women chickened out and suggested dialogue as a better strategy. 'But the men's attitudes hadn't changed,' she points out. 'Willy-nilly we had to be aggressive.' When they organized a demonstration outside the press club, with the participation of half a dozen women and some supportive men, local newspapers carried distorted reports. But the point had clearly been taken: in the next special edition there was no mention of women journalists.

K.S. Lata suggests that women who are successful are specially targeted for gossip. She thinks those in reporting are particularly vulnerable because they are more visible and known to the public than sub-editors. Contrary to popular belief, she says, men can be really vicious gossips.

According to Malavika Ramachandran Banerjee, news editor, *The Asian Age*, Calcutta, she has had more trouble within the profession than outside, particularly in terms of speculation about her quick promotion to her present position. 'If you rise faster than normal in the profession, all sorts of things are implied—especially if you are also good looking,' she says. 'Many male journalists make a point of saying: "I wish I were a woman." Such attitudes make you doubt your own capabilities.'

Non-journalist Colleagues

Quite a few women in the field have faced problems establishing professional relationships with the non-journalist male colleagues they have to interact with in the course of their work. At the basic level, this has to do with the reluctance of many men at any level to take orders from women. As Ram Manohar says, 'At first, the peons here didn't like having to fetch files, etc., for a woman.'

Anjali Mathur admits that she had some initial problems with the layout artists working on a magazine she once edited. However, she believes their non-cooperation stemmed mainly from the efforts of a disgruntled woman on the staff to malign and create trouble for her.

'When I first joined the field, I was naturally more sensitive,' says Swati Bhattacharjee. 'I used to feel that people on the shop floor tried to take advantage of my youth and inexperience. Now they wouldn't dare! I didn't face any physical harassment but did have to deal with comments that made me feel uncomfortable. It was also difficult to figure out how to tackle the subtle ways in which hierarchy operates, especially in a job that entails coordination with many departments.

'For example, some layout artists, photo librarians, etc., expect women to sweet-talk them into cooperating. That gives them a chance to exercise some power and say, "OK, give her the page, she needs to go home early," and so on. Even if you find the process irritating, you have to play the game. If you are rude and become unpopular, your pages may well get delayed. These are the kinds of things girls in the field have to face but boys usually don't.'

The editorial staff in some newsrooms today is at least 50 per cent female, if not more, especially in Delhi and Mumbai. This cannot but have made a difference to the interaction between men and women in the profession. In fact, relationships seem so normal and natural—and have seemed so for so long—that the kind of experiences and feelings so many women mentioned took me quite by surprise.

It seems inconceivable that a young woman working in a major daily in Mumbai in the late 1990s should be reporting that 'Men often talk over your head. Male colleagues and seniors often share jokes in which we are not included. There's a men's group and a women's group.' Yet such a situation is obviously not as uncommon as one would like to believe.

According to Sameera Khan, 'It is tougher to deal with male colleagues than male bosses. You constantly hear seemingly innocuous remarks about women not really needing their jobs, sarcastic comments about the feminisation of the newsroom and caustic references to female bosses. They don't have any legitimate complaints and don't seem to know where to direct their comments. But this kind of thing still goes on.'

Nevertheless, as Sandhya Taksale points out, 'Men in the profession have no option now but to accept women as colleagues, whether they like it or not. Often their comments suggest that they don't really like it!'

End-notes

Appearances can obviously be deceptive. The old concept of the battle of the sexes seems rather outdated and incongruous in the present context, with more and more women entering the workplace, including the media, and the media themselves projecting 'modern' attitudes and behaviour. But, incredible as it may seem , relationships between men and women in the press seem to be still troubled by several age-old problems and a number of new ones. There seems to be little doubt that the current state of gender relations in the editorial workplace leaves much room for improvement.

The root cause of the unease seems to be the persistence of sexist attitudes in a field which is supposed to document and reflect, if not influence, social change. At best, these are manifested in protective, paternalistic approaches. At worst, they lead to varying degrees of sexual and professional harassment. In between lie condescension, belittlement, gossip, victimization, mutiny, sabotage and a host of other unpleasant attitudes and activities. These, naturally, preclude the possibility of healthy and cordial interaction based on equality at the workplace and mutual respect between colleagues.

In some ways, the problems seem to have multiplied, diversified and intensified over the years, as women have come to establish themselves as confident, successful professionals. This is in keeping with trends in other parts of the world. In fact, judging by the experience in the UK, for example, the worst is still to come; in these globalized times, awareness of what has happened elsewhere may enable efforts to prevent things from reaching such a pass here.

For instance, the very title of Ginny Dougary's 1994 book, *The Executive Tart and Other Myths: Media Women Talk Back*, emerged from the new stereotypes invented for successful women in the media: 'a sort of pre-emptive put-down,' as she puts it, 'before women, in any significant numbers, had managed to gain a power base ... '[1]

To quote from her introduction: 'At the turn of the 1990s, when this book was conceived, there was much trumpeting in the media that we were about to enter "The Decade of Women". ... As we drew further into the 1990s, certain sections of the media seemed to reflect, or perhaps to express—which is somewhat more sinister—a creeping ambivalence about whether high-flying females were a good thing. Advertising agencies coined a new title for the successful career woman: The Executive Tart.

'A BBC producer made a film about the first three women newspaper editors, and called it "Killer Bimbos on Fleet Street". The shorthand has stuck, and set the trivializing tone for subsequent articles on Eve Pollard. When she moved from the *Sunday Mirror* to become the first female editor of a mid-market newspaper, the *Sunday Express*, the *Observer's* interviewer described her as “A Killer Bimbo who knows how to use her bosom as a cosh.’”[2]

There is surely an urgent need to avoid descending to that level here.

Through the Glass, Darkly

> *It took me nearly a quarter of a century to reach where I am today. I would have taken less time if I had been a man.*
>
> Dina Vakil

In 1994, when Vakil was appointed resident editor of the Mumbai edition of *The Times of India* (popularly known as the Old Lady of Bori Bunder), she received a card from a market research agency which read, 'Congratulations to the young lady of Bori Bunder.' She wrote back: 'Nice try, but I am forty-eight years old!'

Vakil acknowledges that she may have risen faster in the profession were it not for her gender. But she says the major changes that have taken place in the press in the 1990s—at the middle as well as senior levels of the editorial hierarchy—encourage her to see women making it to even higher levels in the near future. 'Things have definitely improved and, in theory, there should be nothing holding women back from reaching the very top,' she says. Speaking at a seminar on Women in Media in Mumbai in December 1997, she was even more positive: 'You can't put the genie back into the bottle once it's out. Our time to reach the top has come.'[1]

A similar upbeat note was struck by Coomi Kapoor in a 1982 article in *Eve's Weekly*, for which she was interviewed when she was a special correspondent in the paper. 'In these few years women have made far more of an impact,' she said at the time.

'And I don't see why we should not have a woman editor of a national daily in the near future.'[2] A couple of decades later, that future is still awaited.

Kapoor seems less certain today about what the future holds for women in journalism. She believes her appointment as chief reporter was slightly delayed, although she was still the first woman in the country to make it to that crucial post. She also seems resigned to the possibility that the highest editorial post she will occupy is her current one (resident editor). Although she was never one to bother too much about gender and related matters, now she does not dismiss the notion of a glass ceiling. However, she thinks it may have more to do with personality type than with gender: 'Some women can do what it takes and will become editors. Some men can't and won't,' she says.

Nevertheless, quite a few women today are fairly optimistic about the prospects for women in the profession. Says Shiraz Sidhwa, 'When I was with the *Financial Times* (London), I often heard women talk about glass ceilings. It's true that at *FT* all the top people are male. Abroad there does seem to be a barrier at the senior level. But I believe we are fairly fortunate and don't really face discrimination at that level. I don't believe I would not get a job just because I am a woman. In the eighteen years I've been in the field, none of my employers has ever preferred a man to me.'

The Last Frontier

It is true that the situation is not entirely hopeless. The magazine world has been relatively open to women all the way to the top for several years. Women have long been editors of magazines reaching out to a female readership. In the 1970s a magazine for young people was also edited by a woman. And since the magazine boom of the 1980s, women have been editors of a range of special interest periodicals such as film magazines, 'society' magazines, 'interiors' magazines, city magazines and health magazines.

It is in the news business that women have found the climb to the top more arduous. In the present scheme of things, where 'hard' news is still seen as the core activity of the press and all else as peripheral, the power and prestige, not to mention pelf, attached to the editorship of a major newspaper are clearly not comparable to the status that goes with the editorship of any other genre of publication. Even newsmagazines occupy only the next slot in the hierarchy.

To date, no 'mainstream', 'national' daily newspaper or news periodical in India has had a female editor. Mrinal Pande was for some time executive editor of *Dainik Hindustan*, the Hindi daily of *The Hindustan Times* group. Both Dina Vakil and Bachi Karkaria edited various *avatars* of *The Independent*, at one time the second daily of *The Times of India* group, but no woman has headed the *TOI* itself.

As executive editor of *The Hindu*, Malini Parthasarathy is as close to the summit of a major English newspaper as any woman has ever come. And, although she is a trained and experienced professional journalist, she does have the additional advantage of belonging to the proprietorial family. Under the circumstances, there is little doubt that women have yet to reach the peak of the primary editorial pyramid. The glass ceiling may have developed some cracks but it has yet to be shattered.

Not Impossible

Anita Pratap, who has been in 'hard' news from the beginning of her career, acknowledges that there is no easy route to success. However, she believes it can be achieved—with some struggle and at some cost. She has not had a typical career path, having moved from Indian publications to an American one and finally into another medium over a twenty-one-year career. But, she says, 'I have done it all on my own without any godfathers.

Sometimes I haven't even had any allies. But you have to pick your own battles and go on fighting till the end. Nobody is in this business for charity. You have to be willing to pay the price for your success. I have paid my price.'

For some women, the glass ceiling is not an issue. Says Olga Tellis, 'I may be a resident editor now but in my mind I'm still a reporter. I have always been a loner—this is, in fact, the first time I have had to directly interact with other staff. I personally don't think there is anything greater than being a reporter. So, even theoretically, I don't think there is anything great about being an editor.'

Arundhati Mukherjee makes a similar point. 'It is not my ambition to be an editor,' she says. 'I don't want to sit in an office, however plush it may be. I know the newspaper is an editor's medium, like film is a director's medium. But I still prefer to be a good reporter and a creative writer.'

Other women suggest that it would be premature to pronounce a verdict on whether or not a woman will make it to the very top in the foreseeable future. As Neerja Chowdhury puts it, 'It is too early to tell whether there are structural impediments in women's path to the top. It is equally possible that women lack the necessary ruthlessness to get there. To be at the top today you require qualities which many women in the profession don't have. Maybe they are also not prepared to acquire them. I don't think the glass ceiling is inherent in the structure. I suspect it is more a matter of the personality you need to become an editor today.'

If Chowdhury and Kapoor put it down to temperament and disposition, many women are equally convinced about the decisive role played by factors other than gender in determining who gets to the top spots and who does not. For instance, Manini Chatterjee believes that if a glass ceiling does exist 'it has more to do with political views than gender.'

Ideological Barriers

Kalpana Sharma also thinks ideology has a major impact on career paths in the media. She says it was only after she entered the mainstream press that she realized that hurdles do exist—especially for individuals with strong opinions on certain issues.

According to her, 'By obviously having clear convictions on issues not seen as central, such as gender and the environment, I chose a path which ensures that I will not fit into the mould that proprietors want for editors. As far as most managements are concerned, unorthodox views do disqualify you. Strong feminist views may be tolerated but they are not liked. Similarly, the concept of alternative development is only accommodated because of the push from below. Right-wing views on economic matters are seen as all right but not so left-wing views.'

She points out that managements tend to 'look only at that one aspect of you and discount the other qualities, skills, strengths and experience that you bring to the job.' She adds that younger journalists today, including women, are usually savvy about this; even if they have personal convictions about such issues, they are smart enough not to make their views clear in their writing. But she thinks this is a pity because it means readers miss out on the diverse views on various issues developed by serious journalists over years.

In this respect, she says, journalists in the West are better off because different sections of the press there still accommodate different viewpoints: 'If you are professionally competent you can move up the hierarchy in one publication or another. In India the mainstream press, by and large, wants to tread the middle ground. So you see a progression of people who seem to be neutral, even if they are not actually so. As a result, newspapers end up being wishy-washy and oscillating. The situation has been made worse in recent times by the struggle for commercial survival, which calls for stands that are on the right or, at best, at the centre of the spectrum.'

Smruti Koppikar agrees that certain views are more unpopular with managements than others. According to her, being branded 'progressive, left of centre, activist,' etc., and being identified with particular issues, can be a disadvantage in the profession.

Proprietory Concerns

Many journalists believe that the attitudes of newspaper proprietors and managements inhibit their rise to the top in many other ways. Some of the resistance to placing female journalists in top posts is obviously related to traditional attitudes towards women. However, it is clear that recent changes in the profile of the editor as well as the equation between editors and proprietors are equally important factors.

As Kamla Mankekar points out, not only have the approach and attitudes of proprietors changed in recent times, but most of them also play a more active role in every aspect of the newspaper business now. 'They make the decisions,' she says. 'And perhaps they think women can't or won't perform some of the functions they expect their editors to perform, whether it is helping them get licenses from the government, suppressing stories or cooperating in coverups. It is assumed that women will make fewer compromises.'

According to Usha Rai, 'Women go up to a certain level and not beyond that, partly because proprietors are invariably men (except in *HT*) and they feel more comfortable ringing up a man to get the things they want done, both editorially and non-editorially. They may even subconsciously believe that women are not as good at their work as men. Since the editor's job is a corporate management post, the management's comfort level with the individual concerned becomes particularly important.'

What she couches in diplomatic terms, other women state less equivocally. For instance, Sajeda Momin is convinced that resident editor is the maximum height to which a woman can make it in the profession today. She admits, however, that ten years ago even that did not seem possible. The fact that the number one spot still eludes women is a 'totally gender thing,' she says—although, by her own admission, she has never been particularly involved with women's issues.

'If not gender, what is it?' she asks. 'Professionally there is nothing that a woman can't do. Women have the knowledge, the writing skills and the management ability. Earlier there was the excuse that they didn't have experience of hard news; now that justification is no longer applicable. Besides, if subordinates can accept a woman RE, why not a woman executive editor? The fact is that proprietors will always want a male. They will never be convinced that a woman can handle the job. They also want someone who can be a Mr Fix-It. It is not that women can't perform such a role but politicians and bureaucrats may not accept them in that role: corruption is still considered a male domain.'

Rasheeda Bhagat also believes that the glass ceiling is very much in place, thanks primarily to the attitudes and practices of most managements. 'Media barons are not very keen right now to bring women in at the top,' she says. 'People are still not too comfortable dealing with women at that level. The more senior you are, the more you have to interact with the management. It may be difficult for women to become the "fixer" type of editor. At the same time, employers also may not find it easy to ask women to do various jobs for them. Men may be more attuned to their desires.'

Padma Alva agrees that the glass ceiling currently exists 'mainly because of the different types of editors in demand these days and the different kinds of work proprietors want editors to do'. She thinks it may be more difficult for both women and proprietors to relate to each other at this level. Shubha Singh, senior editor, *The Pioneer*, New Delhi, also suggests that it is more difficult for women to establish equations with proprietors.

Many women in the profession believe that managements are more comfortable dealing with men. Some suggest that this may be partly because more men are likely to give in to pressure, make compromises, serve the interests of proprietors or even cross over to the corporate side of the organization. As one woman points out, 'Women tend to be more prone to standing up for what they believe in.'

According to Rita Manchanda, many industrialist-proprietors of newspapers today tend to be quite contemptuous of journalists, sometimes boasting about having bought up this journalist or that.

'They may find it more difficult to buy up women in the profession—partly because the ease and familiarity that often mark the interaction between male journalists and management executives are not always possible with female journalists.'

'The editor's job today involves being hand in glove with the management and keeping the moneybags happy,' says Teesta Setalvad. 'It also calls for a certain amount of wheeling and dealing.' In addition, she says, the view of editorial content as merely the stuff that appears between the advertisements, which many managements today seem to promote, is another inhibiting factor. 'Maybe some women would be quite happy in this environment,' she says, 'but many more may not like it.'

A few women are uncomfortable with this gender-wise characterization of professionals. As Sevanti Ninan points out, 'Not all male editors are involved in wheeling and dealing. Of course, the nature of the editor's job has changed. But different journalists handle the new equations differently. It is not so much an issue of gender as of mental type. When it comes to making compromises and indulging in *chamchagiri* (toadyism) some men do and others don't, while some women do and others don't.'

Freelance journalist Gouri Salvi acknowledges that there may be a gender angle to the ways in which men and women in the profession deal with the new, altered relationships between the editorial and management wings of newspaper establishments. But she suggests that if there are differences in their ways of handling the situation, these may be due, at least partly, to the continuing, gender-based expectations from males and females in society.

Many journalists of both sexes would prefer not to compromise on professional ethics, she points out. However, men are not always in a position to be inflexible because they tend to have (or believe they have) more at stake in their jobs—in terms of professional, financial and social status. On the other hand, she says, women can often afford to take principled stands even at the risk of losing their jobs.

Demand and Supply

Nevertheless, there is a certain irony in the mismatch between demand and supply as far as women and the editor's post are concerned. In the days when a clear dividing line was strictly maintained between editorial and corporate functions and when the old-style editor—of the observer-reader-thinker-writer variety—was still in demand, there were not enough senior women around to be considered for the top posts.

Today, when there are plenty of women with the requisite skills and experience, they seem to be disqualified because the rules of the game have changed and the qualities required in an editor are no longer the same. While many women in the higher reaches of the press today could have stepped comfortably into the shoes of the earlier type of editor, they may not be equally comfortable in the new brands of editorial footwear. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, they may not be considered suitable editorial material in today's circumstances.

But, as some women point out, there are greater chances of the younger women now making their way up the ladder fitting the bill. 'The earlier lot of women in the profession may have been less into power but the emerging breed of women is as ambitious as their male counterparts,' says Madhu Jain. Also, as Vakil points out, young women are now entering a more level playing field and may not have to struggle so hard and so long to rise in the profession. As a result, unless the ground shifts again so that they still find themselves out of sync with the system, the younger generation may find the climb to the top less prolonged and arduous.

Bachi Karkaria is one of the few who suggests that gender could be the crucial factor in deciding who gets to the top spot and who does not, all else being equal. 'For the first time, now, I think gender could be a factor,' she says. 'If I were a man I might be considered for the top spot in the *TOI* at this point: I have the credentials, I have done all the necessary things—but it is not happening.'

Similarly, Anjali Mathur believes it is primarily gender that kept her from being considered even for her current post for so long. 'I had several years of experience, including seven years with this paper. I was also the longest serving member of the editorial staff. But I was literally the last person to be considered for the post of RE. None of the men brought in from the outside had any more experience than I had. Maybe I finally got the job because no more males were available!' Even then, her name did not appear in the printline for a while. And, just to be on the safe side, a man on the verge of retirement was designated executive editor.

Her experience is reminiscent of the case of a woman who had served as both news editor and deputy editor of a Sunday newspaper in the 1980s. When the founder-editor left to take up another job, he recommended that she be appointed editor in his place. However, the management was reluctant to elevate her to the post, despite his strong recommendation and the overwhelming support for her from the entire editorial staff.

It was only after unsuccessfully approaching several editors—all men and most with less relevant experience than the woman concerned—that the management finally consented to appoint her to the top position. Even then, at the last minute, they imposed conditions which would have made her, in effect, just an assistant to the proprietor, who clearly planned to be the de facto editor henceforth. She found this unacceptable and resigned rather than take up such a post. Within days, however, the management had found a more amenable and pliant male editor who seemed to have few qualms about management interference in editorial matters.

In Mathur's case other factors may also have been at work. But, as she points out, they too have to do with gender, at least indirectly. For one, she says, there is a strange perception that, as a woman and as a person, she may not be political enough for the editor's post (this is ironical considering that she was a political activist in her youth). Such an assumption may have been buttressed by her career path, which wound through the so-called soft areas of journalism—magazines, features and social/cultural issues. That, in turn, was influenced partly by the fact that it is easier for women to get jobs in magazines and within the features sections of newspapers and partly by personal preference. 'I honestly believe social issues are very important,' she says. 'And I have always felt more at home with features because there is far less cut-throat competition in that area.'

'I'm not a careerist,' she confesses. 'I'm in the profession because I enjoy it and I think it is important to be in the company of people I'm comfortable with. But being in features goes against you even though the male perception of what is important and "in" doesn't always tally with what the reader thinks is important.'

Professional Grooming

Karkaria speculates that part of the reason for her failure to make the final leap, so far at least, may lie with herself, as an individual and as a woman: 'Perhaps I did not adequately prepare myself for the top spot. Maybe that's partly because I am a woman and partly because everything came fairly easily to me—I have had good breaks despite moving around the country with my husband.'

Vakil also admits that she realized rather late in life that she had to stand up for herself: 'I began to recognize that if I was to be perceived differently I would have to position myself differently. I had to learn to speak up for myself. Women tend not to do that.'

Anita Anand, director, Women's Features Service, New Delhi, is a great believer in the need to specially groom women for professional life. She points out that while boys are subtly prepared, all through their lives, to take their place in the world of work, girls are directly or indirectly encouraged—by society, family and the educational system—to take their careers (if any) less seriously. As a result, they receive little training in goal-setting, negotiating skills, and so on, which become particularly crucial as they reach higher levels in their careers.

She thinks there is marginal acceptance within the profession today of the notion that women should be represented in decision-making positions. But, she points out, 'There are not that many women at that level because so many drop out.'

Many people suggest that if women fall by the wayside it is because the profession calls for too much sacrifice and compromise on the family front, especially in relation to children. However, Anand does not believe this is the only or primary reason for the relatively high female drop-out rate. According to her, 'Even ambitious women sometimes drop out because the profession is not changing enough to make it sufficiently attractive for women to stick around.' She cites the example of several studies in the West which show that women are generally not happy in the workplace.

The career graphs and patterns of many experienced and talented women in India, too, illustrate this fact. A number of them opted out of full-time employment in the mainstream press when they were doing well in the profession and, in many cases, at points when their careers were, in fact, poised to take off.

They cite different personal and/or professional reasons for their decisions: political convictions, ethical considerations, disenchantment with media structures and practices, discomfort with the new ethos and direction of the media, reluctance to compromise on motherhood. But ultimately, all things considered, they clearly found the media wanting and chose to independently pursue their goals, both professional and personal. The fact that many of them are still active journalists, contributing to the media from the outside, suggests that their decisions had more to do with practical, structural or philosophical issues (sometimes all three) than with loss of interest in the profession per se.

Anand, however, thinks the changes in the media brought about by stiffer competition call for greater versatility and adaptability among all media professionals, including women. According to her, they have to be more outgoing and capable of hustling: 'Many women may not want to do this but they will have to move with the times, even if it is initially difficult.' At the same time, she concedes, 'It is not completely correct to say that the right attitude and aptitude are enough. The environment does count.'

Advantage: Women

Interestingly, some women suggest that bemoaning the obstacles in women's path to the top may be akin to barking up the wrong tree. According to them, managements often prefer to have women near, if not at, the top for a variety of reasons, most of them negative. For example, a senior business journalist in Mumbai believes it actually suits proprietors to have women at senior levels: 'They get us cheaper even though we work harder. They think they can exert more control over us. They also believe we are less into rackets and self-promotion.' In addition, she points out, they can no longer have doubts about women's competence after so many have conclusively demonstrated their skills in the field.

Quite a few journalists are sceptical about the general impression that women have overcome the gender-based stereotypes that once blocked their paths to the top. But they suggest that such stereotypes may actually be helping women reach, if not crack, the glass ceiling. According to Sathya Saran, editor, *Femina*, 'At least 60 per cent of the men in management don't take female editors seriously. They think women in that position can be manipulated and browbeaten. I sometimes worry about whether women editors really take themselves and their jobs seriously.'

Meenakshi Shedde, assistant editor, *The Times of India*, Mumbai, admits she sometimes wonders whether women at the top are placed there only because they are competent or also because they are considered more convenient and pliable, and less likely to quit if their arms are twisted. 'The fact is that if you take little doses of abuse for a while, after some time it doesn't seem too bad,' she points out.

Amrita Shah also suggests that proprietors may actually prefer women as editors because they think they are more docile and less assertive. According to her, 'They seem to want to ensure that there are no real editors by turning editors into sub-editors. It may be easier to convert a woman into a sub-editor. Men usually have more of a sense of their own worth and importance and don't seem to have to fight so hard to maintain it. Women have really struggled to get to the top. But, now that they are there, the system seems to be trying to reduce them to subs.'

She also deplores the rise of 'socialite editors' of glossy magazines. According to her, 'There seems to be an emerging breed of publisher-editors, including women, who seem to think they can buy into journalism. They seem to think this is the new, fashionable thing to do—like dealing in art was earlier. They have no professional background or experience. So they hire journalists and get them to manage the technical aspects of bringing out a publication—turning professionals into technicians.

Meanwhile, they bask in the glory, status and power that go with being editors.'

On the other hand, Mala Vaishnav, features editor, *Verve*, Mumbai, cautions that it would be unfair to paint all proprietor-editors with the same brush. For instance, she points out, Anuradha Mahindra, publisher-editor of *Verve*, is very much a hands-on editor. A stickler for quality, she ensures that she gets it by paying attention to every detail of the magazine's editorial and production process, in addition to handling the financial side of running a magazine, says Vaishnav. Obviously glamour and diligence are not always mutually exclusive.

On another note, Karkaria highlights a unique dilemma created by the fact that the few women near the top sometimes have to compete with each other. According to her, 'As the apex narrows down, women may find themselves having trouble with other women. There is an added strain if the closest rival happens to be a woman, partly because professional rivalry between two women is viewed and projected as a petticoat war. Thanks to such stereotypes, it is virtually taken for granted that you are at loggerheads and must necessarily bitch about each other.

'You can't win. You end up tolerating much more and letting go of much more because you feel you have to prove that any type of conflict you may have with another woman is purely professional and has nothing to do with either being a woman. Maybe, in a very amorphous, subliminal, subconscious way, it does have to do with gender: because you are the exceptions you are much more under the spotlight. When men are in a situation of professional rivalry, it doesn't seem to acquire this character—even if the struggle for power and position gets very personal and petty.'

Shobhaa Dé sums up the debate in her characteristic style: 'There is no doubt that women will make it to the top. The proprietor gets a bigger bang with his buck when women are in that position, probably because they have more to prove: they work longer hours, bring more to the job, motivate and invest in their staff and, even better, settle for less pay and perks.

'The older ones may not make it to the very top, but those who are in the fast track now are playing hard ball. They have the required qualities in spades: high voltage ambition and energy, a sense of urgency and, sometimes, an almost frightening ruthlessness. At least some of them seem determined to make it at all costs, demonstrating their willingness to do anything to establish that they are even bigger s-o-bs than the guys and to prove that they have balls.'

Be that as it may, this is still very much a Mumbai/Delhi-centric debate revolving largely around the English language press. Going by what women in other parts of the country and other sections of the press say, it will be at least ten years before it becomes relevant outside the rarefied atmosphere of the metro-based, 'mainstream, national, English press.' Even then and even there, if the renewed system of publisher-editors continues to hold sway, few career journalists—let alone the women among them—are likely to get to the very top spots, at least in major publications. As Aditi De points out, 'Professionalism doesn't seem to count as much as it used to.'

Equally significantly, say some senior women, the question of whether women are likely to make it to the top editorial spot in the near future begs the counter-question: is there such a thing as an editor in chief in the press today? As one of them points out, 'As an editor in India now you do what the proprietor wants.' Another, trying to be as positive as possible in a public speech, said she did not think it was impossible for a woman to become editor of an English broadsheet daily in the near future. But she was honest enough to add a qualifier: 'in whatever form an editor survives in the coming years.'

Long Gestation

Women working as journalists in other parts of the country are currently more concerned about the long gestation period they have to go through at every stage in their careers. It is true that the pace of promotions in much of the metropolitan English-language press has quickened significantly. At least one multi-edition newspaper seems to specialize in news and resident editors—many of them female—with an average of three to five years' experience or less. But women in much of the Indian language press, as well as some English publications, seem to stagnate at the sub-editor level for years before they are rewarded with the next designation: senior sub-editor. In such a situation, the question of women making it into decision-making positions seems a trifle premature.

According to Ira Jha, it took her fifteen years to reach her current position as chief sub-editor, *Navbharat Times*. As she pointed out in a 1996 interview, 'I was the first woman to be promoted in this newspaper although there were others with far more experience. After all, if a woman had joined this profession in the 1950s, she must have something in her that her colleagues and bosses should recognize. In my ten years of experience with this paper, I have been witness to many changes but there is still gender discrimination in the promotion policies of newspaper managements.'[3]

In some places, like Kerala, there is little prospect of professional women reaching decision-making positions in the press in the near future. Not only are promotions slow but the number of women in the press is low and the majority of those are recent entrants into the field. Besides, even women's magazines in the state are often still edited by men.

Tulasi Bhaskaran suggests that promotions are slow in Kerala partly because people are unwilling to recognize and reward women's work and partly because women hesitate to push themselves forward. In addition, there are few women in journalism, let alone at the higher levels. According to Bhaskaran, at a recent workshop for senior journalists in the state capital, she was the only woman among thirty-five participants. A young woman in the state is convinced that the system will never allow a woman journalist to come up. 'One can do a lot in journalism but here they won't let you. They are always trying to put you down,' she says.

Another factor that may influence women's climb to the top is management sensitivity to the question of whether women in high places are acceptable within the local culture and society. As Shikha Mukherjee points out, 'What happened with Gouri Chatterjee in the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* is an indication of the kind of pressure that is exerted when a lone woman reaches the higher levels of the profession.' When the system strikes back, either the employer or the victim employee is likely to beat a hasty retreat to avoid further trouble.

The problem of stagnation is compounded in Andhra Pradesh, for example, by the prevailing 'voucher system' of employment. This enables managements to hire journalists as temporary workers with no access to the rights legally due to regular (tenured or permanent) employees, including fair wages, statutory benefits such as maternity leave, and opportunities for career advancement. But, whatever the form of employment, women seem to be at a greater disadvantage than men in the state in terms of both pay and promotions.

According to E Mani, executive member of the Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists and convenor of APUWJ's Women Journalists' Committee, the problem is so acute that the union is pursuing the option of demanding an official inquiry into irregularities in the labour practices of the press in the state.

Sandhya Taksale concedes that, at the present time, it is not clear when a woman will become an editor in the Marathi press but she is hopeful about the future. Her optimism may be vindicated. According to Swati Mahalank, although it may take another ten years, it will eventually happen because 'girls like me will definitely protest and ask for promotions. I won't tolerate it if I am not given opportunities. Slowly things will change.'

Similarly, a journalist in Bangalore points out that today at least a few forward-looking managements may actually choose to appoint a qualified woman rather than an equivalent man to a high-level post, if only to send out a progressive message. From what most women in the field say, however, if this does indeed happen, it would be the exception rather than the rule.

Possible Reasons

Analysing the reasons for the low rate of promotion among women in the profession, particularly in the vernacular press, Aditi Kapoor suggests that one inhibiting factor is clearly the male-female ratio in journalism.[4] This still continues to be unfavourable to women in certain sections of the press. To make matters worse, most women are concentrated in the features and magazine sections of newspapers or the 'soft' beats in reporting—sometimes but not always by choice. Their consequent lack of experience on the news desk and in 'hard news' reporting, especially on politics and business, often holds them back.

Additionally, says Kapoor, many men in decision-making positions do not seem to be fully convinced about women's professional capabilities even when they have proved themselves. Women in the profession also suggest that men in the press are either protective or aggressive and seldom view female colleagues as equals. As a result, they say, women have to work twice as hard and long as men to be accepted and recognized in the profession.

Further, says Kapoor, women are at a disadvantage because the press, in many ways, still functions like an old boys' network or club, in which promotions are linked not so much to merit as to social networking and being of 'the same kind' as the decision-makers. It is more difficult for women than for their male counterparts to transcend social barriers and become familiar with the men in power who make the decisions. She also suggests that women themselves tend to be diffident about pushing their way ahead because the prevailing atmosphere is not encouraging, if not actually hostile.

Finally, Kapoor points out, the absence of proper internal assessment systems and promotion policies goes against the interests of women in the field. For instance, there are no transparent procedures based on clearly defined norms for judging the professional worth of employees once they are recruited. The fact that no objective criteria seem to be available or required makes it all the more difficult to pinpoint discrimination in promotions.

Female Bosses

Meanwhile, the presence of women at least at number two spots in some major newspaper organizations raises the question of whether their gender makes any difference to the way they handle themselves and their staff. The response, especially from younger women in the field, is mixed. While some young journalists suggest that women are no different, others say they are sometimes worse bosses than men.

Pamela D'Mello does not think women influence work culture in any special way. After all, she points out, they also have to conform to the existing culture of the organization as well as of society.

A young reporter in Mumbai says, 'Sometimes women seniors seem to be more paranoid and less sympathetic than males in their positions. In any case, they are certainly not more sympathetic. Nor do they keep out of power games: it is clear that some of them can be as aggressive as the men. At the same time, some of them are also more democratic. It seems to be more of a personality thing than a gender thing.'

According to a journalist working with a Marathi magazine in Mumbai, 'Sisterhood is a myth. Everyone is looking out for themselves. Successful women may say in public that women should come into the profession, etc., but I have received more help from male bosses than female ones. Many women at the top seem to think: "I've gone through all this, why are you making such a fuss?"' This is reminiscent of what quite a few women say about female obstetricians.

A young journalist in Chennai claims that women bosses are more difficult to work with. This is despite her own early experience of working with a woman who, as editor of a local magazine, reportedly groomed many women journalists in the city over a ten-year period. She alleges that female editors are often not ready to accept ideas, especially from women colleagues, and tend to be selfish, sometimes grabbing stories from juniors. 'Men also do all this,' she admits, 'but it hurts more when a woman does it. Somehow one expects them to be more open and receptive. One is conditioned to expect the worst from men.'

Similarly, Renu Sharma claims that male bosses offer a more peaceful work environment than their female counterparts. In her experience, 'A woman boss sometimes hurts female juniors psychologically. Successful women often deprive younger women of their own legitimate successes.'

For some, however, working with female bosses has been a more positive experience. For example, Angana Parekh says she has found women bosses more understanding, more willing mentors, less egoistic, and altogether better bosses, especially for other women in the profession.

On the other hand, many journalists—both senior and junior—suggest that personality rather than gender determines style of functioning. As Swati Bhattacharjee points out, one woman boss may be personally sympathetic and understanding but may prefer staff to adhere strictly to fixed office hours. Another may be less rigid and more open to flexitime because she truly believes that everyone needs to spend time with their families. Similarly, one woman may be a more approachable and empathetic person than another who may be more aloof or aggressive and intimidating.

Bhattacharjee endorses the suggestion that some women bosses seem to be even stricter than their male counterparts and offers an explanation for the phenomenon. According to her, 'Male bosses try to keep a distance. If you mention a family problem they probably would not ask for details, partly because of a sense of delicacy. It is more difficult to pass off lame excuses with a woman boss. They are more frank and straightforward and can't be fooled so easily. It is also true that if a man questions your right to cite a personal reason for not doing something, you may interpret his response as rude and harsh, if not sexist. If a woman does so you may not react in the same way. Women bosses don't have to mince words with female staff because no other meanings can be read into their reprimands.'

Tapti Roy, former resident editor, *The Asian Age*, Calcutta, concurs: 'A woman boss may not be as sympathetic as a man in her position. It is possible to take advantage of the fact that, for most men, women's life experiences are quite exotic.' Vasanthalakshmi also believes that paternalistic male bosses tend to be far more indulgent towards women's demands for special concessions and privileges. 'I used to get more annoyed than they did about women taking leave for trivial reasons, etc.,' she says.

However, some women in decision-making positions have another view on the matter. For instance, Rita Mehta, editor, *Cine Blitz*, Mumbai, thinks female bosses tend to be more understanding: 'We realize that a woman can't cut herself off totally from her house and family.' For example, she says, in her magazine she tries to ensure that those who have children are able to take leave in May, when schools are closed, by requesting others on the staff to take time off at other times.

Similarly, Vakil suggests that a female boss is likely to be more aware that things do not come easily to women in the profession and that whatever women have achieved they have done through hard work. Having gone through that process herself, she says, a senior woman can be more empathetic and more sensitive to the special needs of women in the field.

She cites as an example the way she negotiated with the company's human resources development manager to grant long leave to a reporter who had problems in her pregnancy because she did not want her to have to quit her job for such a reason. She also suggests that women may be more willing to allow for other types of handicaps. She mentions that her staff includes an assistant editor who is blind and she was considering taking on a sub-editor who is deaf. In her view, however, the most important feature of an editor, of either gender, is fairness.

According to Shobhaa Dé, as an editor she had no problems with female staff staggering working hours to suit their convenience or even bringing their babies to the workplace. 'Life is easier for everybody that way,' she says. She may have learnt this lesson from her first publisher, a man, who permitted flexitime before it became a buzzword—so long as work was done on schedule.

However, not all women in decision-making positions have a particularly gender-sensitive approach to management. For instance, neither Nalini Gera nor Malini Parthasarathy claims to be especially alert or responsive to the problems and dilemmas faced by women on the staff of their organizations. According to Gera, who was once publisher-editor of *The Maharashtra Herald* group in Pune, 'As an employer, the interests of the organization came first.'

Working Environment

Nevertheless, most women in the profession agree that women working together tend to create a different atmosphere, especially when the boss is also a woman. Walking into the features section of *The Telegraph* brought back fond memories of the fun and camaraderie we enjoyed in the women's magazines I have worked with, as well as in the Sunday magazine supplement of a newspaper that I once edited, where the only male staffer was a short-term trainee. Most colleagues who have worked in other female-dominated offices or departments report a similar, warm atmosphere, in which lasting friendships were forged and intimacies—not to mention lunch—were shared.

In fact, a friend and colleague who moved from the women's magazine we were both working with to a newspaper where she was initially the lone woman took a long time to get used to the absence of lunch-time camaraderie. In our old office, we would wait for each other and have our packed lunches or take-aways together, along with relaxed, friendly, often intimate, conversation. In her new one, everyone seemed to attend to his nutritional needs independently of social and emotional needs. Another friend and colleague from the old days regrets that she has never since worked on an all-woman editorial team because the experience had been so enjoyable.

In the *Telegraph's* features section that morning, an informal, friendly atmosphere prevailed, with laughter and banter accompanying the distribution of cake and the sale of *kantha* kurtas (not, incidentally, a regular office activity!). The few men on the staff seemed quite at home and in tune with the carnival spirit. Soon enough, things quietened down and everyone was busy in front of their respective computer terminals, attending to the day's work in earnest—with lingering smiles to light their way, I like to think.

The responses of women working in the department to the question of whether women create a different work environment or culture are interestingly varied. According to Chandrima Bhattacharya, women working together do interact at a more friendly level and share a greater degree of intimacy with each other, discussing friends, family and life in general.

Bhattacharjee agrees. She points out that a different atmosphere prevailed when the department was housed in the main newsroom, and not in the separate space it now occupies. 'There, with more men around, there seemed to be more stress on being proper, reserved, etc.,' she says. 'Some girls who hardly talked then have become very voluble now.'

She says colleagues now talk about all sorts of things: 'There is no major separation between the personal and the professional. We also tend to be more supportive of each other in times of crisis. There are fights, of course, but those would happen anywhere with anyone.' According to her, there is another positive feature of the small team to which she belongs within the department: 'We all encourage each other to spend time with our respective families. We adjust our work accordingly.'

Rajashri Dasgupta, who leads the team to which Bhattacharjee belongs, acknowledges that the atmosphere in the workplace is more relaxed and enjoyable when there are more women around. 'Even men enjoy the difference,' she says. 'It's obviously better this way for both men and women.'

Gouri Chatterjee, who heads the department, admits that women do create a different work culture and environment but says she cannot tell whether this is necessarily good or bad. She thinks it probably works both ways: while a relaxed atmosphere, goodwill and camaraderie are the positive benefits, the expectations created by such an atmosphere could be less desirable. She also hastens to add that no one style of functioning is superior to another: 'It is just that men and women tend to express affection and concern in different ways. I may behave in a certain way but my way is just one way of doing it—not necessarily the only way.'

Sharma, however, believes that 'women do have different ways of managing people and their styles of functioning are distinctive.' She thinks women in positions of power are able to come across as non-threatening. By reaching out to the personal side of each person, she says, they manage to build teams and bring out the best in their staff. Even simple acts such as the sharing of lunch *dabbas* (boxes) can contribute to bonding, as can sharing personal experiences and problems, she points out.

Taksale highlights another benefit of women working together. 'When there are more and more women in the office, one doesn't feel so out of place,' she says. 'There is also a different kind of culture within the office. You can definitely feel the difference in attitudes. For example, when there are more women around we are seen as journalists first.'

Women as Mentors

Mentoring has not yet been identified as an important issue in most workplaces in India. But Sharma believes most senior women do consider it their duty to help others in the profession, which is what mentoring is all about. On the other hand, she admits, many women journalists who have had the advantage of class, education and early breaks, tend to see their experience as typical. As a result, they often do not acknowledge that career advancement may not be quite so easy for others. 'This is a pity,' she says, 'because, as a person in that position, you have an advantage and can push for changes that will allow more women to reach those positions.' One cannot generalize on the basis of one's own experience, she points out.

It certainly seems true that the relationships built up among women at work often continue long after they have gone their separate ways—personally, professionally and even geographically. Also, quite a few older women in the profession have the experience of being tapped for personal as well as professional guidance by younger former colleagues long after they have stopped working together.

Clearly, many women in the press think women have the necessary qualities to be good mentors. This includes some who are not particularly attuned to gender issues. For instance, Sidhwa suggests that women tend to be more caring and encouraging, and to give more freely of their time to people who have problems. At the same time, she says, they are not only more professional but also have a life outside the office. Similarly, Alva reports that many people in the news agency, including peons and drivers, seem to find it easier to confide in a woman.

However, D'Mello does not see much scope for mentoring under the prevailing circumstances. 'Mentoring doesn't take place in a world that's becoming more and more individual-oriented and career-driven,' she points out. 'That doesn't mean it is not needed. It *would* help people grow in the profession and thereby also improve the overall quality of the press.'

There may be a generational difference here. The attitudes and expectations of younger women have been shaped by a world that increasingly encourages, and even applauds, fierce competition in the pursuit of individual goals rather than cooperative functioning for the collective good. As an old-timer, I was, in fact, quite startled to hear a young woman like Ajanta Chakraborty saying in a matter of fact manner: 'I do not expect any support from anyone. Journalism is a very competitive field. Everyone is concerned about survival. There's no place for support. I'm happy if I am at least not deprived of opportunities.'

Female Bonding

However, even those who are not totally convinced about the gender angle to relationships at the workplace admit that they do tend to form lasting friendships with colleagues, not only but particularly the females among them. Coomi Kapoor, for example, is still known to regularly meet former colleagues over a meal and to keep in touch with them at a personal level long after their professional paths have diverged. Many of these are women and most of them her juniors. So, also, Sharma, Vakil, Karkaria and many others, including myself.

Shobhaa Dé who, in any case, claims she is more comfortable with a female-dominated staff, says she retains strong bonds and maintains contact with most of the women she has worked with: 'We got involved with each other's lives. Those women and their lives matter to me. I haven't felt that way with male colleagues because my relationships with them have been more light-hearted.'

According to Saran, she finds working with women exciting: 'There is a certain synergy. We don't have to contend with all sorts of biases and mental blocks created by conditioning.' She points out that, in a women's magazine especially, this kind of easy relationship helps staff to discuss various issues that are relevant to readers, too.

Simran Bhargava, editor, *Cosmopolitan*, New Delhi, also highlights the advantages of a female-dominated workplace. 'Women have a different working style,' she says. 'Men tend to push work into the evenings. They don't have an internal alarm—so they hang around, loiter and shoot the breeze. Women tend to be more focussed workers: working hard through the day and getting out of the office at 6 p.m. When women work together, there is less tension and conflict about how work is to be organized.'

According to her, 'The emotional barometre also changes with women. You do have to deal differently with them. There is much more expression of feeling in women's interactions. That, of course, has its downside, too. But, on the whole, women are more emotionally developed, more bonded, more likely to feel for each other and to fill in for each other. At one time, one thought one had to desexualize oneself and be more like a man. But now you don't have to play the male any more. You don't have to deny the fact that you have a home and children. Apart from that, women are used to managing chaos and this helps them to manage work as well.'

However, a number of professional women do not see female bonding at the workplace in as positive a light. According to Shabnam Minwala, 'A lot of women working together tend to get very involved with each other and each other's lives, the personal relationship outweighing the professional. Men bring in a fresh perspective. So it's healthy to have both working together.' At the other end of the spectrum, Leela Menon says she finds it easier to work with men because women tend to be jealous, critical, and fault-finding.

There are obviously as many opinions on this matter as there are women in the press. Still, Priyanka Kakodkar has a point when she says, 'We are lucky that the space has been created and we have women at the top now. Their presence there serves as an example and sends off a signal that it is not impossible.'

End-notes

There seems to be little dispute among women in the profession over the existence of a glass ceiling, at least in news organizations. Over the past couple of decades, several women have been and continue to be editors of magazines and the features sections of newspapers. However, their professional progress in the news business has been much slower and more limited.

At present, the glass ceiling confines those women who do make it up the traditional editorial ladder of mainstream newspapers and current affairs magazines to the number two spots, at best.

However, there is considerable variation in women's perceptions of the future, ranging from optimism through caution to cynicism and pessimism. Similarly, they differ about the primary reasons for women's slow rise to the top, ranging from the structural through the social to the personal.

There is some recognition that recent changes in media management policies and practices may work against women who are currently near the top. At the same time, it is likely that the younger women making their way up the professional staircase may well possess or be prepared to acquire the qualities now required of editors.

Clearly the debate about the glass ceiling makes sense only in a few media centres, where women have had a chance to prove themselves and work their way up to where they are at least within striking distance of the top. In other parts of the country, most female journalists are still chafing at their slow-motion movement up the lowest rungs of the ladder.

Meanwhile, the glass ceiling is very much in place in other parts of the world, too. For example, only in this decade did three women become editors of national newspapers in the UK, none of them major broadsheets. As Ginny Dougary points out, 'It is only when you consider that there are twenty-one top editing positions on Fleet Street newspapers, eighteen of which are occupied by men, that the dazzling figure of Three Women Editors loses its lustre... Women have been allowed to edit the down-market tabloids—the so-called comics of Fleet Street—but they are still effectively barred from the heavyweight broadsheets. This is significant because it is the quality newspapers which have real influence; their editors are the opinion-makers of society.'[5]

Although there is some divergence of opinion among women in the field about the management styles of female editorial bosses, there is considerable agreement about the humanizing influence of women in editorial workplaces. It may be too early in the day to claim that a transformation has taken place, but, in a recent article in *Cosmopolitan*, Bhargava suggests that the trend in most workplaces is in that direction:

'Welcome a gradual (grudging) recognition of the unique strengths women bring to work: teamwork rather than cut-throat competitiveness. Group instead of Self. Consensus instead of Because-I'm-the-boss-and-I-say-so. Women's emotional edge could turn into a business edge when you think of women not as being over-emotional but as having in-depth emotional capacities. Male bosses are beginning to recognize also that any woman who has managed house, kids and work has highly-developed skills of time-management, chaos-management and crisis-management. Maybe the guys should get a shot at it too.'[6]

It may be a while before this kind of thinking permeates the press in a perceptible way, but it is a nice thought all the same.

* * *

Women on Top

While women have been slowly inching their way up the journalistic stairway, a few women have been actively involved in the management of the press. Most female publishers entered the field through the family route. While some belonged to families with a long history in the publishing business, others used the financial resources of families involved in business and industry to buy existing publishing companies and their products or to launch new publications (mainly magazines).

Leela Parulekar (of the *Sakal* group of publications) was one of the earliest women to be active as a publisher. Saroj Goenka is associated with the southern Indian section of the now-bifurcated *Indian Express* group. Shobhana Bharatiya heads *The Hindustan Times* as editorial and executive director of the multi-media group.

However, family connections do not always guarantee smooth sailing for women trying to run publishing houses, as Nalini Gera found out. Gera got involved in the newspaper and publishing company set up by her father a little late in the day, after having her three children. Nevertheless, she equipped herself with a degree in journalism and joined *The Maharashtra Herald* in Pune in 1977.

According to her, she sat in the newsroom and subbed copy with the rest of the editorial staff. She deliberately wore only saris to work in order to project a serious image.

Despite all this, she says, it took a long time for the staff to accept her: 'The general attitude is that if you look like a society woman, you must be brainless. It was a long while before anyone asked me for an opinion on anything.' By 1980 she began to work in earnest and took the initiative to launch a number of supplements to accompany the main paper. In 1985, she launched *Pune Digest*, a city magazine which she now sees as 'a good idea whose time had probably not yet come.'

Her troubles began after her father died in 1992. He had encouraged her to take over the publishing company from him while her brother looked after his other business interests. However, after his death her brother laid claim to the newspaper business, too, although he had had nothing to do with it until then. Her mother supported his claim over hers. Gera eventually left the paper in 1995, after an unpleasant tug-of-war within the family, which she lost.

Looking back on her experience, she suggests that her brother's desire to gain control over the publishing company, despite the other enterprises he headed, may have had to do with the power and prestige attached to the newspaper business. Her high profile as a publisher-editor gave her a status in society which was different from that which comes with wealth alone. She surmises that this may have caused the resentment which led him to oust her from that position.

How much of this extreme case of sibling rivalry had to do with gender is unclear. However, it seems fairly evident that the mother's support of the son's claim (reminiscent of the alignments in the Bhutto family in Pakistan) has strong patriarchal roots.

Today Nirmala Lakshman, Nalini Krishna and Malini Parthasarathy are equal partners in the publishing house jointly owned by the heirs of the founder-patriarch who launched *The Hindu* as a nationalist alternative in English to the colonial press. But there was a time when they had to struggle to establish their full rights as co-owners of one-third of the newspaper company in which their father served as publisher until his untimely death while they were still children.

It was only after repeated requests to her uncle, who was then editor of *The Hindu*, that Lakshman was finally allowed to join the editorial staff of the paper. She worked with the Sunday magazine supplement, functioning as a sub-editor for many years before she reached a decision-making position even within the magazine section of the paper. Parthasarathy faced inhouse resistance several years down the line when, armed with a journalism degree from Columbia University, she wished to plunge straight into political reporting in the capital city.

Their battle for acceptance was waged on two fronts: the proprietorial family to which they belonged and the professional journalists who were both their colleagues and, in a sense, their employees. Fortunately, intra-family tensions were diffused before they reached flashpoint. And over the years they have managed to win respect from their journalist colleagues through their own professional work.

But the going was far from easy. On the one hand, they had to prove to colleagues that they were professionals who were there to work and contribute to the paper as much as anyone else. On the other, they had to constantly ensure that they were not sidelined in the administration and management of the company. According to Lakshman, 'For the first six to seven years, it was difficult to make inroads into the administration in terms of control or decision-making. Now we have as much say as anybody else on the board.'[7]

Does any of this have to do with gender? Lakshman thinks the fact that their branch of the family is all female did contribute to their initial troubles on both fronts. In the male-dominated editorial department of *The Hindu*, they faced resistance from men who were not used to taking directions from women. Within the family, they were not expected to play an active part in the running of the company (let alone to become full-time professionals). And they were certainly not expected to insist on being accepted as full and equal partners in every respect. When they did, they met with resistance which then had to be overcome. Parthasarathy, however, believes that gender was merely used as a disguise for what was essentially an intra-family power struggle.

In any case, these two experiences demonstrate that even women born into publishing families cannot always take their position for granted.

10

A Touch of Class

> *Working in a small district town in Rajasthan, where girls hardly go out, I had izzat (self-respect) ... My problems began in Delhi.'*
>
> Neelam Gupta

Gupta, sub-editor, *Jansatta*, New Delhi, stopped wearing jeans when she moved to the capital city towards the end of the 1980s. She did this mainly to avoid lewd attention from colleagues in the national Hindi newspaper she works with, located in Delhi's Fleet Street. And that was the least of her problems, as outlined elsewhere in the book. Significantly, she had faced no harassment working as a journalist in smaller places like Kota, Jaipur and Chandigarh.

Not much seems to have changed since Sevanti Ninan wrote, 'The nice thing about being stranded at 1 a.m. in a hill station in the middle of nowhere is that it is a lot safer than Delhi' in a light-hearted account of her experiences as a young journalist hitting the country road.[1]

If there is one Achilles' heel that many women in the profession are still willing to acknowledge they have, it is their perceived vulnerability in the strange and remote areas they sometimes have to go to in the course of their work. Yet most women who have travelled far and wide to write on events and issues in different corners of the country report that the proverbial Indian hospitality is not a foolishly romantic myth, especially in the countryside.

Many would agree with Rupa Chinai when she says, 'Generally, you can go just about anywhere in rural India and find support.' She herself landed up unannounced at a Bodo village in the middle of a forest in Assam in the 1980s only to find that the one person whose name she had been given as a contact was not there. Members of his tribal community were a bit bemused at her sudden and unexpected arrival in their midst but obligingly guided her to his hut and played host until he returned. With health as her current beat, she continues to travel extensively, sometimes to remote tribal areas.

Radhika Ramaseshan moved to Guwahati from Mumbai and covered all the seven north-eastern states for several years. She found she could travel at night, alone in a taxi with an unknown driver, even in the 'insurgency-ridden' areas of Assam and Nagaland, without encountering hurdles or even feeling afraid. According to her, not only was she able to work as freely in the north-east as she could in cosmopolitan Mumbai, but she never felt her gender was a handicap there.

Safety and Security

Meena Menon agrees that people in rural areas and small towns are, as a rule, courteous, hospitable, kind and helpful. 'They treat you like a guest,' she says. 'They have a great sense of self-esteem and go out of their way to be nice to an outsider. For instance, I stayed with local people while touring backward districts in Himachal Pradesh for a story—they seemed thrilled that someone had come to see and listen to them. Even hotels in small towns are, on the whole, safe.'

The sense of security reported by many women who have taken the plunge and gone wherever their work took them, is not a new phenomenon. Amrita Abraham, senior editor, *The Indian Express*, Mumbai, tells a story from her early days in journalism—when 'one also felt one was invincible,' as she puts it.

When her train pulled into the railway station in the small town of Nanded in Maharashtra at 3 a.m. she realized she could not go any further at that time of the day. She settled down on a bench to read a book, continuing to do so even after two men joined her, sitting on either side of her. The station master promptly came up and asked her to follow him to the first class waiting room. He instructed her to sit in a seat near the door, where he could keep an eye on her as he walked up and down the platform. She felt so secure that she even fell asleep. Her self-appointed guardian woke her up at daybreak and told her she could take an autorickshaw to her destination.

According to Ayesha Kagal, 'nothing unpleasant ever happened' when she travelled all over the country during her years with *The Times of India*. She admits she found herself in all sorts of situations but says, 'If you understand the culture of the place and slip into that you can always find a man who will be your *bhai* (brother). That's an easy way to overcome the man-woman thing in a pleasant manner. On the whole, people welcome you everywhere. Everybody wants to talk about their problems. They know you are there to listen to their stories. You also symbolize hope. It's almost like being a doctor.'

Hardly anyone claims that there are no trials and tribulations or scary moments in the process of discovering India. As Ninan puts it, ' ... things aren't always tickety-boo. Going rural ... can be ... trying. You tend to emerge with a sore bottom, smelling faintly of murky green ponds, and spotted bright red with bed bug bites.'[2]

Also, travelling alone, especially at night through unfamiliar terrain, is not quite the same for women as for men. As Menon points out, 'The worst part is travelling on buses, where you do occasionally come across creeps. There are scary times when you have to fend off unwelcome hands. But it is important to move around and build up the confidence that you can handle it.'

Jyoti Punwani had two unpleasant experiences in the course of one evening in Raipur, where she had gone on a reporting assignment in the 1980s. First, a passing cyclist grabbed her hand as she was travelling alone in a cycle rickshaw on a crowded road after dusk. Then, having wound up her work close to midnight, she found it difficult to get a rickshaw to take her back to the hotel. When she finally managed to get one driven by a small boy, a cyclist began to follow them. Fortunately, two policemen on patrol noticed her predicament and escorted her to the hotel—but not before scolding her for roaming around on her own so late in the night.

'There have been moments when one has been quite frightened,' admits Nupur Basu. While covering the 1991 by-elections for *India Abroad*, she was able to leave Hyderabad for Nandiyal, the then prime minister's constituency, only by 8 p.m. 'It was an eerie experience to travel through the night in a taxi with a strange driver through rocky, Naxalite country,' she reports. 'I began to imagine all the things that could happen. To avoid getting into a panic, I desperately started a conversation with the driver, asking him about his family, his home, his life—anything to establish a human, personal connection. I felt that would provide some kind of protection.'

Apart from coming up with such innovative strategies to ensure safety and security to the extent possible, women find it also helps to have a stubborn streak. When Basu got to her destination in the middle of the night, the one decent hotel was reportedly full house. She had to use all her skills of persuasion (to put it mildly) to get a room to herself. In the morning she found she was the envy of colleagues who had got there earlier but were forced to share cramped rooms.

Sajeda Momin had a different experience trying to find overnight accommodation in Gonda, where she had gone to cover a riot for *The Telegraph*. Having decided to spend the night in the town, she went to Hotel Gonda International, 'which looked somewhat respectable', and asked for a room. 'The man at the reception desk looked me up and down and said no rooms were available. I told him I actually needed two rooms—one for the driver and the peon who were accompanying me. Then a man standing next to the receptionist asked: "What do you do?" When I replied that I was a journalist, I got the rooms. They explained that it was hotel policy not to rent rooms to single women.'

There is obviously no denying that, even today, there are pockets in the country where women can still feel threatened. Shabnam Minwala set off for Dharampur in Uttar Pradesh in August 1997. Her brief was to spend the eve of the fifteenth anniversary of the nation's independence in a village that had not changed much since 1947. She took a taxi from the closest town, Mathura, but had to complete the journey on foot because no road went up to the chosen village.

When she got to her destination, she was subjected to interrogation by the men of the village, first the *dalit* (scheduled caste/tribe) males and then the upper caste ones. Having passed their respective tests, she was despatched to the womenfolk of the lower caste groups. At one point in the day, the *Thakur* (upper caste feudal lord) summoned her for inspection. 'It was like stepping into the Middle Ages,' she says. 'This was the kind of village where wolves still carry babies away.' At night, she was made to sleep on a charpoy (cot) in the centre of the Harijan square, while the women slept in a circle around her and the men formed a circle around them. They explained that they were anxious about the possibility of the Thakur attempting to rape her.

They finally woke her up before daybreak and told her they would like her to leave because they were not confident about being able to protect her. At dawn, as she was walking with the boys assigned to accompany her out of the village, a Thakur from another village going by on a tractor with his grown-up son insisted on picking her up and sandwiching her between them. 'It was quite frightening,' she says. 'Having gone through that experience, I may now have second thoughts about taking such risks. I would probably have a photographer or even my husband accompany me on a similar assignment. It's a pity—I feel it's a sell-out.'

The Class Advantage

Most women agree that their overall sense of security, based on their largely positive encounters in the hinterlands, could stem from the fact that they overwhelmingly belong to a social and economic class which usually ensures a certain amount of privilege and protection. Although class is clearly a delicate and contentious issue, there is no getting away from the reality that it has some bearing on women's experiences and image within the profession.

Few people would deny that women in the press, particularly English language publications, have traditionally come from more well-to-do backgrounds than many of their male colleagues. This was certainly the rule rather than the exception in the days when salaries in the media, determined by officially constituted wage boards, were relatively low compared to other professions requiring similar levels of education. While men from the upper classes were expected or preferred to go into more lucrative and/or prestigious professions, women from equivalent backgrounds were more free to choose their vocations. The exceptions to the rule in the old days were the men who, equipped with Oxbridge or equivalent (invariably foreign) degrees, entered the field laterally, often as assistant editors in major national newspapers.

Journalism became a more financially viable and attractive field in India after the magazine boom of the 1980s, which led to a proliferation of jobs and a concomitant rise in salary levels. Since then, the class distinction between men and women in the profession has become less pronounced.

However, some socio-economic disparity seems to persist, even today, among journalists working in the English language press and those employed in some sections of the Indian language press. This may be partly because of the widespread alienation of urban, educated elites from their mother tongues, which makes them ineligible for jobs in Indian language publications. But it is also due, in part, to the lower salary scales prevalent in much of the vernacular press, even within media establishments producing both English and 'language' publications.

There is little doubt that the class factor has facilitated the entry of Indian women into prestigious fields of work, including the media, and influenced their experiences as professionals. The majority of women in journalism enjoy the benefits associated with social and economic privilege, such as relatively liberal parents (without whose acquiescence they would not be in the field in the first place), quality education, facility with English, self-confidence and, above all, access to people and places, contacts and support systems.

Many women point out that socio-economic background often works in their favour in the field, too. 'Class is a definite advantage,' says Sharma. 'People don't want to tangle with you because you have connections and clout.' Shikha Mukherjee confirms that 'class is definitely a facilitating factor.' According to Shubha Singh, 'More than gender, it's class that influences the way people perceive you.'

Several women suggest that the combined effect of class and the prestige attached to the media works to their advantage. 'The drawbacks of being a woman are usually offset by class as well as the general respect commanded by the profession,' says Manini Chatterjee. According to Neerja Chowdhury, 'Women journalists are now accepted as a species, whether in rural areas or by the political class. This is partly because politicians and others you deal with don't look at you as a woman: you are a *patrakar* (journalist). They don't equate you with their womenfolk—you are seen as different.'

As Momin puts it, 'We hide behind two things: class and profession. The class factor becomes prominent in many situations. As a journalist you are often not from the same class as the people you are talking to. That puts you in a position of power and advantage. In addition, the profession acts as a shield because its members are better placed than most people to ensure justice, and so on. I was able to live in a place like Lucknow only because I was protected by both my class and the fact that I am a journalist.'

Even in socially conservative Kerala, several women report that they face no problems on out-of-town assignments, even when they have to stay overnight in hotels. According to them, the fact that they are journalists representing known newspapers provides them with some protective armour against the customary gossip.

However, a number of women point out that being perceived as well-heeled can be both an advantage and a disadvantage. As Angana Parekh says, 'Class does protect you quite a lot from unwanted advances and other unpleasant experiences in the field. But it can also work against you in some ways. For example, many men in the profession assume we are all dilettantes. This may be because many of us are in journalism out of choice rather than necessity. But such perceptions can even influence promotions and salaries.' According to Ramaseshan, 'To be an urban, English-speaking woman in Lucknow—and UP in general—can work both ways, as an advantage as well as a disadvantage.'

Razia Ismail recalls that, when she was a journalist in the 1970s, class origins sometimes provoked scepticism and challenge from colleagues. 'The general attitude was: "You know English but what else do you know?" One was often baited about using autorickshaws instead of buses. There was a lot of teasing related to the privileges of your class.'

Things have obviously not changed very much. Class still seems to be a convenient handle used to pull women down a peg or two. 'Male colleagues often make seemingly innocuous comments about your class and gender,' says Sameera Khan. 'They try to imply that you don't need the job. Earlier they may have said that women can't be taken seriously because they don't work late, get pregnant, etc. But this seems to be the new tack.'

Shobhaa Dé states categorically that, in her experience, class has been a major barrier. She believes there is a gender angle to the way she has been portrayed by the media and therefore perceived by the public. 'A great deal has been made of my affluence, my lifestyle and what they call my penthouse,' she points out. 'A lot of the prejudice and criticism I've encountered has to do with my being seen as elite and therefore not kosher. Gender does play a role here—Khushwant Singh is from a very affluent family but hardly anyone refers to his highly privileged background.'

Gouri Chatterjee believes class and cultural background had a lot to do with her troubles as news editor of the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*. She suggests that her colleagues found it difficult to accept her because 'We didn't gel culturally. I was an outsider in every sense.' But while class may have been a disadvantage in that respect, she points out, it also provided her with an advantage: she could choose to quit.

Cultural Differences

Quite a few women admit that the socio-cultural gap between male and female colleagues creates some awkwardness in day-to-day interaction. As Ismail points out, in the early days, when there were hardly any woman in the field, the men didn't quite know how to relate socially to a woman colleague: 'They assumed that we would either sit with the few other women in the office or compete with them.'

According to Rajashri Dasgupta, most male journalists at the *Business Standard*, Calcutta, in the early 1980s were clearly embarrassed when they were first confronted with female colleagues. She thinks their discomfort was compounded by the fact that the women, who came from a different social and cultural milieu, had few inhibitions about interacting with men.

Sharita Rai, special correspondent, *The Indian Express*, Bangalore, suggests that differences in the socio-cultural and even economic backgrounds of the bulk of the men, on the one hand, and the majority of the women, on the other, could be responsible for the tension and misunderstanding that sometimes characterize interactions between men and women in the editorial workplace even today.

For example, for many male journalists, their female colleagues bear little resemblance—in dress or deportment—to the women in their own families and social circles. Many of them are brought up to think of the female sex in terms of the virgin/vamp, goddess/ temptress divide. The ease and confidence with which most professional women today relate to the opposite sex, and the fact that some of them may even smoke and/or drink, puts them in the vamp-temptress category in the eyes of some male colleagues. This perception probably lays the foundation for some of the offensive behaviour women have to put up with in the profession.

Yet another aspect of women's experience in the profession is also influenced by class to some extent. Take, for example, the general perception that women journalists are less corrupt and corruptible—in terms of cash, kind or power—than many of their male counterparts. Most women in the field believe they deserve this image, although they concede that there is an increasing but still relatively small number of exceptions to the rule.

This is not to suggest that integrity is necessarily inherent in the female persona, although some women clearly think it is. Gender becomes relevant here mainly because, as mentioned earlier, a large majority of women in journalism has traditionally come from more affluent backgrounds than many of their male colleagues. This fact, if nothing else, may make them less vulnerable to monetary or material temptations. Equally, because of their socio-cultural background and relatively limited exposure to 'the big, bad world', they may have more inhibitions about indulging in nefarious practices. Whatever the underlying reasons, it is clear that class is an important factor contributing to the comparatively clean image women in the profession currently enjoy.

Several women highlight the fact that female journalists in sections of the Indian language press face many more problems than their counterparts in the English language press. They propose that this, too, could be related to the different socio-cultural, if not economic, class background to which the majority of them belong. Such an assumption could be controversial but, going by what a number of women in the language press say, it is not as far-fetched as it might seem.

For instance both Vaasanthi and S Subha point out that the composition of the editorial staff of the Tamil press is largely determined by the question of who has sufficient facility with the language to become professional writers in it. It is well known that most urban, upper class youngsters—including girls—attend English-medium schools. As a result, they are seldom fluent enough in their mother tongues to work in the local language press. Consequently, Tamil publications tend to acquire journalistic personnel from the rural or semi-urban middle classes, members of which are more likely to have the necessary Tamil-medium education.

This trend is, no doubt, applicable to the press in most Indian languages. Another factor that affects the class composition of the vernacular press in general is the relatively lower remuneration offered by many language publications, as mentioned earlier.

Clearly, there are exceptions, especially towards the top of the editorial hierarchy. This is partly because editors of Indian language publications are often established names from the literary world who either enter journalism at that level or perceive it all along as a parallel, if not secondary, profession or vocation. Several female editors of language publications belong to this category, including Vaasanthi and Mrinal Pande.

Many career journalists at lower levels in the language press make no bones about the fact that they are from middle or lower middle class backgrounds. Quite a few of them also come from small towns, if not villages. Class seems to make a major difference to their lives. This is partly because their income is often crucial to family finances and partly because of the greater load of domestic duties they generally carry.

A number of them mention that the nature and hours of their work create problems for them, especially if they are married and live with conservative extended families, in which daughters-in-law have prescribed roles to play. On the other hand, some of them point out that they have been able to break out of the limited lives to which they would probably have been condemned if they had remained in their native cocoons. Many say they were encouraged to seek new horizons by middle class parents who had non-traditional aspirations for their daughters.

Several women highlight the benefits they have garnered as members of this particular profession. For instance, a significant number of women in Kerala specifically mention that they have gained considerable self-confidence by working in such a field. Jyoti Shukla points out that she was a small-town, middle class girl from Raipur, whose education had been entirely in Hindi, when she came across an advertisement in a magazine for a journalistic post. The fact that she was able to get a job in a major newspaper in cosmopolitan Mumbai just by responding to an advertisement in a magazine and appearing for a test 'says a lot about this profession', she says.

Frontier Territory

While class and occupation can help provide a protective veneer for women in the field, there are places where the disadvantages of gender override the advantages of class. As Rajashri Dasgupta puts it, in places like Bihar 'you do feel the pressure of being a woman alone.' Momin also believes that special strategies are required to overcome barriers in places where both women and men are still reluctant to talk to strangers of the opposite gender, like much of Bihar.

According to her, 'If I tried to interview a man on my own in such a place, he would simply not respond. On the other hand, once a male colleague had initiated the conversation, the man would usually condescend to answer my questions, too.' Since it worked the other way with women interviewees, she learned to work in tandem with male colleagues, trying to ensure that she was always accompanied by at least a male photographer. 'In cities people have got used to women journalists but in smaller places it's easier if you have a man with you,' she says.

Most women agree that local culture plays a major role in their experience of the profession. Interestingly, however, women journalists seem to find more acceptance in the rural areas of most parts of the country than in many urban centres, barring major metropolises.

'In rural areas they accept you 100 per cent,' says Vidya Subramaniam, assistant editor, *The Times of India*, New Delhi, who was based in Lucknow and covered Uttar Pradesh for a few years. 'Rural people are more broad-minded than we expect them to be. They may treat their own women quite badly but not someone like me.' According to her, the more backward the area, the more conducive it often is for women journalists to function in.

'You can see the difference between the western and eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh,' she points out. 'The former is materially better off than the latter. You encounter more respect as you go eastward. To the west of Meerut, towards the UP–Haryana belt—which is largely semi-urban and prosperous, with a major presence of big farmers, etc.—the values are worse and there are more lumpen elements who behave badly.'

Although she did not face major problems in Lucknow, except in finding suitable accommodation, she believes this may have had to do with the fact that, in a way, her profession superseded her gender. The status conferred on her by her job was obvious from the fact that the cycle-ricksbawallab she engaged to ferry her to and from work would only address her as *saab* (sir). 'You are a *saab* if you occupy a certain kind of position in society, irrespective of whether you are a man or a woman,' she explains.

However, Momin has a different view of Lucknow. Thanks to their small-town, conservative mentality, she says, most local people could not comprehend why she had come to live there: 'They couldn't accept that it was just a professional decision. They felt there had to be an ulterior motive. They saw me as quite alien—born and brought up in the UK, with no family ties with Lucknow, and not even married! Quite a few stories about my character and persona did the rounds, probably because they simply couldn't quite place or understand me.'

Subramaniam's primary problem in Lucknow was loneliness, her social isolation made worse by the fact that there were few women in the field there at the time. According to her, male journalists in UP are quite backward in their attitudes to women. Ramaseshan, who also worked in Lucknow for some years, agrees that the male members of the local press corps appear more conservative and malevolent than the rest of society. For instance, some of them went out of their way to humiliate female colleagues by bringing out a 'Diwali special' maligning each one of them (as discussed elsewhere in the book).

But her own difficulties had to do mainly with her secular stand on current events and issues, which earned her the title 'honorary Muslim'. She says she faced more pressure from fellow members of the press than from the Bharatiya Janata Party and its affiliates in the communalized atmosphere in the state at the height of the Ayodhya (Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid) controversy. When journalists gathered at the secretariat every evening for the day's official news, she was often subjected to snide remarks about her stories. Finally, she says, it got so unpleasant that she asked for government press releases to be sent to her office and stopped interacting with the local press.

Similarly, the only harassment she faced in the north-east was due to some of her stories, which were perceived as hostile to the ruling regional political party of Assam. It was assumed that her coverage was influenced by her professional and marital status: as an employee of a Calcutta-based publication and the wife of a Bengali. 'You were labelled anti-Assamese if you were seen to be sympathetic to oppressed minorities,' she explains. 'However hard you tried to be as objective as possible, people just assumed that you were taking sides.'

Momin says the worst experience of her decade in India was househunting in Delhi. Despite having access to a generous house rent allowance, she found it difficult to find accommodation in the capital. 'Everything was wrong with me,' she points out. 'I was a single woman, a journalist and, above all, a Muslim.'

When one landlord was told by the real estate agent that she was a journalist, he apparently leered and said suggestively: 'I don't want your business clients coming here.' A prospective landlady kept them standing in the rain as she pointedly asked the agent the critical question: '*Kon jat ki bai*?' (what community is she from?). Then she berated him for bringing along a Muslim when she had made it clear that she didn't want 'such people' as tenants. According to Momin, 'Life in India can be difficult for a female professional who is single, alone and "different".'

Conservative Attitudes

Momin is convinced that the special cultural characteristics of each place and, indeed, each publication, influence the experiences of women in the profession. For instance, she and most other women in Calcutta suggest that the parochial, conservative nature of much of Bengali society has a bearing on how women in the profession are perceived in the city. 'Women are seen as all right,' she says, 'but only for the safe area of features. It is assumed that they don't know much about politics.'

Several of them also point out that women have a better chance of being accepted in the Calcutta press corps if they conform to the traditional image of the Bengali woman, in terms of looks, clothes, demeanour and language. Dasgupta believes that if she slowly gained acceptance from male colleagues in the early days it was mainly because she fitted into their image of the good Bengali girl. A number of women in the city trace their initial difficulties in establishing professional relationships with sources as well as colleagues to the fact that in one way or another they did not quite fit the bill.

Many women in the profession allege that in some places there is, even now, a tendency to assume that a woman's professional success is due to some personal factor. Often it is linked to a romantic or social connection with decision-makers in the organizational hierarchy. But, according to Momin, such dismissive attitudes are less common in the rural areas: 'There they seem to be quite proud and impressed that a girl is involved in this type of work.'

Occasionally appreciation comes from unexpected quarters. Momin talks about an experience she had while covering the riots that broke out in Ayodhya the day after the initial attack on the Babri Masjid. A policeman commended the courage she and her male colleague showed in going about their work without the protective gear that even the police use. He seemed particularly inspired by the fact that a woman could be so bold and brave in the face of obvious danger. 'Sometimes you are given extra status because you are a woman,' she points out.

Certain words are repeatedly used to describe the prevailing atmosphere in particular places. In Hyderabad, for example, the words 'feudal' and 'feudalistic' recur constantly as women talk about the environment in which they have to function, both within the press and outside it.

For instance, Pushpa Iyengar, special correspondent, *The Times of India*, Hyderabad, describes the local press as relatively 'feudal, docile and submissive'. She points out that nobody, not even journalists, ever interrupted former chief minister NT Rama Rao. What is worse, she says, journalists used to remove their footwear outside his room, as if they were entering a place of worship. According to her, the feudal atmosphere made her feel even more obliged to be aggressive, if not belligerent, in her questioning. She was able to get away with it because she represents an outstation paper.

In Kerala, the favoured word is 'pseudo-progressive'. Most women suggest that the low representation of women in the state's press corps is only natural, considering the prevailing attitudes towards women in the state. According to Kareena B Thangamam, 'In Kerala equality and freedom are elusive, despite everything.'

As Parvathy Devi R puts it, 'Kerala is pseudo-progressive. Now there is a bit more consciousness and at least a small section is beginning to change. But in many ways society here is going backwards in terms of women's status. The fact that there are so few women in the media here is a good example of how social attitudes influence women's choices.' According to her, 'Women are not considered good enough for such a prestigious, serious and heavy-duty profession. People ask: why not be a teacher, a nurse or even a doctor? I also think it has something to do with the fact that the media deal with politics and politics is not supposed to be women's business—it's not a coincidence that there are hardly any women in Kerala's politics.'

Kusuma Kumari also says, 'Society in Kerala has not accepted journalism as a suitable job for women. People prefer women to work in a fixed place for fixed hours.' According to Renu Ramanathan, 'In this society, women's careers have to fit in with the structure and convenience of their families. There are rigid ideas about what is and is not suitable work for women. Any field in which they can wield power is not encouraged. For example, few Malayali women educated within the state go into the Indian Administrative, Foreign or Police Services. Fields like electronics and computers, which are popular today, are all right because most women going into them ultimately end up as just glorified typists. The general attitude is, 'Let her get a BA or even an MA and then get her married."

Leela Menon is quite blunt in her assessment of the situation: 'Kerala women are backward, despite their education and the fact that so many of them work outside the home. Most of them don't have the mental strength to go out and do things independently. They tend to be timid and think it's dangerous to go out into the field.' Thanks to 'feudalistic Kerala men', she says, 'Women are brainwashed to be subservient. They are both breadwinners and bonded labourers: they do all the domestic chores, take full responsibility for children, hold jobs and hand over their pay to their husbands.' She says the progressive reputation of the state is in many ways a superficial facade.

The most popular word to describe Chennai seems to be 'conservative'. When Iyengar moved from relatively liberal Mumbai and Goa to Chennai, she switched from trousers to salwar kameezes in order to be accepted as a serious journalist. In some offices, the sari is the more accepted attire. Quite a few journalists also point out that families in the city are often opposed to late hours of work for women.

However, Aditi De has a different view of the city. Having worked in Chennai before moving to Bangalore, she suggests that the former city affords women considerable freedom to work even though it may be conservative in other respects. On the other hand, she points out, Bangalore does not always live up to its liberal, cosmopolitan image.

Several other women journalists in Bangalore also imply that the city's reputed sophistication is often just a superficial veneer.

For example, when Basu moved from Delhi to Bangalore in the early 1980s, she found that her fashionable clothes and sleeveless blouses attracted unwanted attention and made a conscious decision to dress more conservatively for work. Similarly, Saswati Chakravarti says she found the city even more conservative than Calcutta when she moved here in the late 1980s. According to her, the editor used to ask her questions like: 'Where is your bindi?' 'Why aren't you wearing a sari?' 'Why are you wearing jeans? Do you think this is Los Angeles?'

Social Disapproval

Women in different parts of the country mention that the strange hours of work demanded by the profession often occasion adverse comments about them in the neighbourhoods and communities to which they belong. According to Jaipur-based Rajkumari Rohila, 'Society frowns on women staying out late. If they return home late at night, neighbours view them with suspicion.' Similarly, Asha Mathur says, 'Given my middle cass background and my neighbourhood, I have to be careful about the hours I keep.'

But quite a few women also point out that they are considered special and respected even by otherwise conventional people. Ishani Datta Ray, for example, appreciates the broad-mindedness of her neighbours in the conservative, middle class locality of Calcutta where she lives with her parents. According to her, they never question or make disparaging remarks about what she may be up to. 'In fact,' she says, 'they praise and admire me, even though my hours of work provide scope for misconception and gossip.'

Interestingly, many female journalists in different parts of the country specifically mention that they never accept alcoholic drinks at public functions or parties to which they are invited in the course of their work. In Chennai, most of them say they have adopted this strategy to avoid being misconstrued. It goes without saying that men in the profession rarely have to think about such matters, let alone make such concessions to local culture.

However, in Mumbai, the reasons for abstinence in the professional sphere seem to be different. According to Sujata Anandan, she and many other women in the field do avoid drinks at the cocktail parties to which they are invited as journalists. But this has nothing to do with social pressure. Instead, it is a free and conscious professional choice based on their wish to keep a clear head while at work. To accommodate their preference, one politician has apparently taken to inviting women journalists for afternoon lunches, though he still entertains their male colleagues with evening cocktails and dinner!

On the whole, as Shukla says, 'Mumbai culture is such that you never feel you are a woman. It's a safe city for women and people here are open-minded and helpful.' Of course, this image of the city has been somewhat tarnished in recent times.

Many women in the field acknowledge that they do make various concessions to local culture and the backgrounds of the people they have to meet in the course of their work—in the dress code they adopt for work, for example. They say this is mainly to ensure the cooperation of sources, which entails gaining their confidence and achieving a certain comfort level in their professional relationships.

For instance, many women think it is easier to gain acceptance in many situations if they wear a sari or, at least, a salwar-kameez. They suggest that while Western clothes may be all right for certain beats in the metropolitan cities, they are often not suitable for other beats and certainly not appropriate in small towns and rural areas. As Sharita Rai points out, many politicians today belong to conservative sections of society and have already come a long way in accepting women in the field as professionals. It seems unnecessary to test their tolerance further by dressing in a manner that would make them feel ill at ease.

Foreign Encounters

In contrast but for similar reasons, many Indian women functioning as foreign correspondents in the West say they avoid wearing 'ethnic' clothes for work. According to Anjali Mody, this is because she prefers not to unnecessarily call attention to her gender and ethnic identities lest they get in the way of her work. 'I don't want to be stereotyped,' she says. 'And I don't want to give people an opportunity to do that to me. As a journalist, I am there to get information. If I can't do that because of the way someone perceives me I would be failing in my job.'

However, Shrabani Basu says that if she sticks to Western clothes for much of the year it is mainly for practical reasons related to the infamous English climate. In the summer, she often wears salwar-kameezes to work and saris for official functions, especially in the evening. Interestingly, R Akhileshwari says she took a deliberate decision to wear Indian clothes when she was based in Washington, mainly to avoid racism. According to her, 'It is easier if you make it clear that you are neither part of a local minority nor an immigrant. In a way, my obvious Indianness became my defence.'

But few journalists have had to accommodate the local culture of another country to the extent that Anita Pratap had to for her award-winning coverage of the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. With the militant, fundamentalist group disapproving of both working women and television, she had little option but to agree to wear a long black gown in order to interview its leaders.

End-notes

One aspect of journalism which makes it both attractive and intimidating is the fact that it entails travel, often through unfamiliar, uncharted territory and under less than ideal conditions. For women the excitement of the news chase is sometimes dampened by perceptions of their special vulnerability as females, especially when they are on their own among strangers in isolated parts of the country.

However, in practice, most women have found the Indian countryside relatively safe and the rural folk by and large hospitable. Even in small towns, which have a rougher reputation, they have found that their socio-economic class and the prestige attached to their profession, as well as their own self-confidence, have provided them with some degree of status, security and leeway. Although some have faced embarrassing and even scary moments in the course of their wanderings, few cite really unpleasant experiences in the hinterlands.

Women's experiences in the profession are often dependent on the social and cultural environment prevalent in various places. While the socio-cultural norms in some places, like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, are only to be expected, those still current elsewhere—as in Calcutta and Kerala—are somewhat surprising, at least to non-locals. Obviously women sometimes make strategic concessions to local culture in order to get their work done and/or to ease their way in the profession.

A point worth noting here is that most women in journalism in India today belong to the upper classes and castes and other relatively privileged communities. It is clear that deliberate and sustained efforts are required to ensure that more women (and men) from disadvantaged communities—dalits, *adivasis*, religious and ethnic minorities, for example—are enabled to participate in the media. Gender is clearly not the only or even the most insurmountable barrier maintaining the media as an exclusive professional preserve.

Nevertheless, it is remarkable that most women currently working in the press in different parts of the country seem to have figured out how to step around the various socio-cultural landmines they find in the field, using confrontation and compromise, as appropriate, to ensure that they can function effectively as journalists.

11

The Generation Gap

> *Our generation has little idealism left, but the little that remains is with women. The most important thing today is to be successful. There are women who think that way, too, but there are more women around who will fight the system and do whatever they can to change it.*
>
> Shabnam Minwala

The 1990s witnessed a virtual explosion in the number of women in the Indian press. The charge of the female brigade may be most evident in the English-language press, especially publications based in Delhi and Mumbai. But there seems little doubt that journalism is attracting a growing number of women across the country. Even those sections of the press earlier closed to women are increasingly opening their doors to the young women clamouring to be let in. If some newsrooms in the media capitals have crossed the 50-50 mark and are on their way to becoming female-dominated, hitherto all-male fortresses in other places are also crumbling as the trickle of young women entering the profession grows, slowly but steadily, into a stream.

This should be a moment of triumph but the celebration, if any, is likely to be muted, judging by the responses of most older women in the profession to the new entrants. As Pamela Philipose says cautiously, 'There has certainly been a quantum leap in the number and visibility of women in the press but, in terms of contribution, it's a mixed bag.'

Many senior women are not willing to be that charitable. The words most frequently used to describe the new generation of journalists (both male and female) are: lazy, pushy, brash and arrogant. They are commonly referred to as the 'brat pack'. They are seen to be fiercely ambitious and in a tearing hurry to reach the top—by any means—without putting in the necessary groundwork. Their apparent lack of commitment to anything other than their own career advancement is deplored, as is their seeming disregard for professional quality and standards.

At the same time, a number of older women concede that their younger counterparts are confident, spirited and focussed. Some acknowledge that the negative qualities exhibited by many young journalists of both sexes today can be traced to the ills that currently beset both society and the press. And a few point out that there are, as always, a number of exceptions to the rule.

Shobhaa Dé is, expectedly, the most blunt in her comments. According to her, young people in the profession today may be ambitious and focussed but they lack both commitment and scruples. 'It's the "me"-oriented generation,' she says. 'They are self-important, self-absorbed and self-indulgent. They bring very little to the table. They hardly read at all. They are lazy and have no work ethic. They seem to be looking for the easy route to success. They hammer out stories handed to them on silver platters. They don't want to move their butts out of the office. They prefer air-conditioned journalism.'

Madhu Kishwar, editor, *Manushi*, Delhi, also has a poor opinion of the new generation of journalists. According to her, most young people in the profession today are pushy, ambitious and swollen-headed, motivated chiefly by glamour, fame and power. Having been interviewed by several young journalists, she finds them ill-equipped for their jobs. 'I've lost confidence in their ability to listen properly, let alone take down facts accurately,' she says. 'They can't construct sentences and don't seem to understand the meaning of words. But they do have supreme arrogance.'

According to Madhu Jain, 'Whatever qualities women once brought into journalism have by and large disappeared. The competition and the celebrity factor in journalism today have made it into a power trip for most newcomers. In addition there is the arrogance of youth.' She thinks the young women in the profession today are as hard-boiled as the men. In a hurry to get to the top, they seem willing to do anything to speed up the process. As far as they are concerned, the ends seem to justify the means, she says.

On the other hand, Seema Mustafa sees the new generation primarily as 'a sea of faces, with nobody really making a mark.'

The Silk Route

Many older journalists endorse the allegation that young people in the field today seem less inclined to stomp the streets in search of stories. As Ritu Sarin puts it, 'Today's youngsters are reluctant to get on a state transport bus to pursue a story. They haven't faced the rough and tumble of journalism. If they go anywhere, they travel by office car. They don't bother to do the necessary legwork. As a result, the quality of reporting is going down.'

According to Manimala, 'The new journalists lack the stamina to do hard work, not to mention the sincerity. Even if they don't have social commitment, what about professional commitment? They just want to be stars overnight.'

'I'm disappointed and disillusioned with the new generation,' says Teesta Setalvad. 'Of course, one can't generalize but, on the whole, they are too lazy to do any homework and want to be spoon-fed. They are starting at much higher salaries today but a certain cynicism has crept into both men and women in the profession. They seem more concerned about their own careers than anything else.'

Many women suggest that vaulting ambition is at the root of the negative qualities attributed to the new crop of journalists, both male and female. As Bharati Pradhan puts it, 'They are too arrogant and in too much of a hurry to sit in the editor's chair. Their language is by and large poor but they won't look up the dictionary. Both their writing and their editing are slipshod. I wish they would take a little time to learn the job before attempting to climb the ladder. Because they are in such a hurry they also burn out quickly. They don't have the maturity to cope with the real demands of the profession.'

A number of people identify 'attitude' as the primary reason for what they see as the generally poor performance and reputation of the younger generation. 'There is a major problem of attitude,' says Sathya Saran. 'We were more conscious that we belong to a larger universe and are mere cogs in the wheel. They believe they *are* the wheel. As a result, they are not willing to learn. So there is a lot of misreporting, sensationalizing, irresponsibility and lack of empathy in their work.'

'The new lot doesn't know how to write news and that's mainly because of their attitude,' says Manjiri Damle. 'They take it all very lightly.' Anita Rao Kashi has found attitudes changing even in the four years she has been in the profession. 'People who have entered the profession recently don't seem to have a sense of discipline and don't seem to be serious about their work,' she says. 'They would do anything to get in but once they are in they are casual about their work, doing stories on the phone, not cross-checking facts, and so on.'

The predilection for 'telephone journalism' is, in fact, a recurring complaint about the young ones. As Gouri A. Athale points out, 'Many of them are getting into bad habits like doing entire stories on the phone. You really need to do some legwork and meet people personally at least until you have established a good rapport with them. It may be all right to do short reaction stories on the phone but it doesn't seem right with features. We were taught to slog it out.'

Many older journalists also bemoan the fact that youngsters in the field neither acknowledge nor utilize the many advantages they now start with. According to Saran, 'The younger ones begin with a richer data bank, having grown up exposed to a wide range of information. But they don't seem to make use of this asset. The depth of their reading is also not very good.' Aditi De points out that, if the young people in the profession read at all, their 'serious' reading is largely confined to current affairs magazines.

Short-term Players

Saran thinks the tendency to treat every job merely as a stepping stone to something better is another unfortunate side-effect of premature ambition. 'People now change jobs in journalism as fast and as often as in advertising,' she says. According to her, some young women justify moving out of *Femina* by saying they find the job too shallow. Yet, she points out, they often go into equally shallow jobs in another publication or move out of journalism altogether.

Aditi De believes that the overriding importance given to 'the market' today is partly responsible for the fact that youngsters seem more interested in what they are going to earn than in the content of their work. 'There is a lot more talk of money these days,' she says. 'The earlier excitement of being in this profession, the personal satisfaction derived from writing well and doing interesting stories seem to be less important now. The perspective has changed. Many young people seem to see jobs in the press as a transitory phase, a stepping stone on their way to something else.'

Simran Bhargava agrees that quite a few young people 'seem to be short-term players because they are ambitious, restless and in a hurry to get somewhere quickly.' She suggests that the older women in the field today have invested far more time in the profession and, often, in a particular publication.

A number of older journalists point out that the primary attractions of a career in journalism for young people today seem to be the glamour, the sense of power and the other extraneous benefits that come with it. As Carol Andrade puts it, 'It's natural that young journalists want to get ahead but the rewards seem to attract them more than the work.'

According to Kamla Mankekar, 'Some are conscious of their role as journalists. But most seem to be more attracted by the feeling of power. Yet they are not mature enough to use their power with care. The sense of power also makes them arrogant early in the day.' Olga Tellis agrees: 'The new lot are arrogant and don't do their homework. Arrogance is one of the most dangerous qualities for a journalist to acquire.'

Vasanthalakshmi also believes that 'Young journalists are now attracted by the visibility and privileges that come with the profession but are not very conscious of the social role and responsibility that go with it.' As Amrita Shah puts it, 'Today's young people don't seem to see the difference between public relations and journalism. One can't really blame them because the whole edifice of the media has become like that. Still, it is wrong to enjoy the privileges of the profession without taking on at least some of the responsibilities.'

'Youngsters nowadays don't seem to be motivated by idealism,' says Kalyani Shankar. 'They seem to be more attracted by the glamour and the sops to their egos provided by the profession.' According to Roopa Rao, there is a definite difference in the approach of young people in the profession today: 'Many of them seem to be more interested in using their designations to further their contacts and promote themselves.' But then, as Tellis points out, 'The whole profession is changing and becoming money-minded.'

Lack of Commitment

A number of older women also refer to the apolitical approach and lack of 'commitment' evident in the new generation of journalists. As Kalpana Sharma says, 'In my days, social and political movements created a certain consciousness about society amongst the youth. Many people came into journalism through the activist route—for a purpose, not just a career. This was reflected in the quality of journalism then. Now the majority don't see it as a vocation. Some may be conscious of issues at a personal level but don't identify with them at a professional level. Of course, one can't blame them because that is the atmosphere they have grown up in and are coming into. It is heartening that, despite this, you do see some youngsters with ideals even now.'

'It is encouraging to see the large number of confident, ambitious and even conscientious young women coming into the profession with clear aspirations and goals,' says Tanushree Gangopadhyay. 'But they seem to lack any vision. Although they have benefited from the women's movement, they prefer not to accept that reality and, in fact, claim to be "above" gender "bias". The competitive ethic in the media today also keeps them away from the earlier ideals of solidarity and sisterhood.'

Some people suggest that the 'attitude' problem is compounded by the fact that many more youngsters today are coming into journalism through the high level contacts of their parents or other family members. This obviously enhances their acceptance and visibility within the profession, their access to people and places and their consequent greater chances for early success. In the less ambitious, this easy route to a high-profile career can also lead to a higher propensity to dilettantism, they point out.

Nevertheless, most seniors recognize that environmental factors have contributed greatly to the unflattering profile of the '90s journalist, male and female. They are, after all, products of their times and reflect the norms and mores now prevalent in the society as well as the profession to which they belong.

For instance, if most young people in the field today do not seem to be motivated by a burning desire to change the world, it is clearly a sign of the times in which today's young adults have grown up. The youngsters coming into journalism are often no different from their contemporaries going into other fields. It is also a sign of the new times in journalism, where 'commitment' is a bad word and the dice are clearly loaded against 'bleeding hearts'. Savvy young people are obviously reading the writing on the wall and adjusting themselves to survive and succeed in the prevailing environment.

Similarly, some people point out that the recent trend towards the 'corporatization' of the media cannot but have had an impact on the self-perception, persona and performance of young people in the profession. For example, Mustafa suggests that the smartalecky demeanour of many young journalists is essentially a fallout of the corporate culture permeating the press today. This could also have led to the tendency of the new generation to be extraordinarily preoccupied with appearance and lifestyle. According to Ayesha Kagal, quite a few young women in the media today talk in terms of marrying a very rich man with a Porsche, etc. 'Surely this is not what the great battle was all about?' she asks.

A number of seniors propose that recent changes in journalistic practice have also encouraged the casual approach as well as arrogance widely associated with the younger set. As Athale puts it, 'Today, the overall climate in the profession and the easy options offered by technology are leading to flip attitudes. It's not a question of gender because both men and women are affected. It's more a question of what is required of journalists today.'

K.S. Lata is more specific. 'The liberal use of bylines has led to an attitude problem,' she says. 'In earlier times, only stories which the editors considered really special and worthwhile got a byline. But now everything is taken as an exclusive. So youngsters get used to seeing their names in the papers almost every day. It's not surprising that it turns their heads.' She points out that the problem is particularly acute in business journalism, in which young people are quickly thrown into the company of the top names in the corporate world. 'Such quick access can be very heady,' she points out.

According to Manchanda, the increased competition in the media today has put considerable pressure on journalists to be on the fast track. Newcomers, especially, may be tempted to cut corners to get ahead. In any case, she says, under the influence of television, hardly anyone seems to feel the need to use libraries any more.

Sharma agrees. 'This is the era of soundbite journalism,' she points out. 'Superficiality is taken for granted. Short-cut journalism has become the norm today. Competition ought to improve quality but instead it has encouraged people to use short-cuts to win the race. Journalists who research their subjects are few and far between. In earlier times, one couldn't get away with so little work.'

While acknowledging that some young women in the field today are confident, enthusiastic and even serious about issues, Rajashri Dasgupta suggests that there is a flip side to the picture. 'The overall culture of hard, rigorous work is gone,' she says. 'There is a tendency to go in for the quick-fix kind of work—relying on telephone interviews for stories, for example. We had to struggle hard for bylines—no overnight story would get you one. It was a different kind of training.'

Instant Journalism

Several senior women acknowledge that at least part of the problem lies with lack of guidance from the top, with few editors today paying attention to the details of what appears in their publications. Madhu Kishwar puts the blame for the present deplorable standards in the mainstream press on the deprofessionalization taking place within journalism. As a result, she says, no demands are made on young journalists. 'I see no reason why editors can't or don't teach them the elementary norms,' she says. 'Fresh recruits should at least be made aware of basic requirements such as accurate reporting, cross-checking of facts, coherent sentences, proper transitions, and so on.'

However, the species of editor who looks beyond the scoops and the headlines and calls staff to account for shoddy reporting and editing seems to be endangered, if not extinct. The occasional one who is still fastidious about both facts and grammar runs the risk of being labelled an old fogey who has not changed with the times. As Devika Sequeira says, 'On-the-job training is not as intense as it used to be. Even major national newspapers have become casual about everything.'

Many women point out that the ascendancy of 'short cut', 'instant' or 'quick fix' journalism is primarily due to the new, casual approach of the editorial hierarchy. As Sujata Anandan says, 'The trend is to do quick stories which are not adequately sourced and cross-checked. Sometimes one side of the story is given one day and the other side only the next day.' It is clear that closer, more consistent scrutiny by editors could help avoid the recurrence of such malpractices. But while most established journalists acknowledge the solid grounding they received from their seniors in the old days, few young people entering the profession today seem to have that advantage.

At the same time, not everyone is convinced that all young people today would welcome guidance. According to Sucheta Dalal, 'Many juniors, especially men, don't want to admit they don't know something. This is irritating not just to editors but even to sources. Young journalists also seem reluctant to spend the time and effort necessary to cultivate sources. It's clear from their stories that some of them have only one or two sources but they won't admit it.'

Reverse Gear

Two other serious, emerging problems related to youngsters in the field are highlighted by a number of senior women in the profession. One is the apparent willingness of at least some young women to use sex as a means to get ahead. I mention this with great hesitation and caution, acutely aware and wary as I am of the traditional tendency to attribute women's success in almost any field to their use of 'feminine wiles', if not sexual favours. However, it may be worth noting the reported trend, if only because it could have repercussions on the overall image and status of women in the media.

It is true that a few women of the older generation are believed to have been helped up the professional ladder by the godfathers with whom they are rumoured to have had sexual relationships. That was at a time when sugar daddies were assumed to represent the best, if not only, route to success. However, most women who came into the profession a little later were determined to establish themselves as professionals in their own right and did it on their own terms, without using their femininity or sexuality to prop them up.

The new reported trend towards the deliberate use of sex for career advancement may reflect recent changes in sexual mores, at least in certain sections of Indian society. Shobhaa Dé claims to have been openly told by some young women that if sex is the price for success, they are game. According to her, they are quite free and upfront about using sex and believe that they are in control of the sex game they play with their male bosses. Several other women confirm that this is the case with a number of young women in the profession today.

Without necessarily taking a moral position on the issue, the point is that indigenous Lewinskys could well jeopardize the reputation for professionalism and quality work that their predecessors have struggled hard to establish and, indeed, that many of their contemporaries also wish to maintain.

Frills and Froth

The second worrisome trend identified by many senior women is the tendency for young women—more than their male contemporaries—to be pushed into the frothy world of celebrity and lifestyle journalism. As C.K. Meena points out, 'Women entering the field are increasingly being encouraged to get immersed in trivia and frivolity. This could represent a step backwards, with these women running the risk of being slotted once again.' She admits that this genre of journalism is likely to grow and flourish, with publications getting increasingly upmarket. But she thinks it is significant that women seem to dominate the magazines and newspaper supplements devoted to 'light' lifestyle features, tidbits of celebrity gossip and round-ups of high society high jinks.

Again, it is easy for young journalists to get taken in by the glamour and prestige of hobnobbing with celebrities. And, certainly, the seemingly insatiable thirst for publicity evident in many people nowadays gives even junior reporters covering high society a taste of power and control, not to mention the high life. However, it is not clear that they can gain real professional respect through this route, however heady it may be in the initial stages. And, perhaps unwittingly, they are allowing themselves to be redirected into a new *avatar* of the 'women's beat'.

Positive Feedback

Nevertheless, many older journalists see the attitudes and approach of young people in the profession in quite a different and more positive light. Dina Vakil agrees that standards in the profession have dropped drastically and that the culture of dissent has gone out of journalism.

But, she says, 'The younger people are coming into a different journalistic world, in which there is no awe or reverence towards elders or editors. They are more spirited and ambitious and have clear aspirations. This is good. I was always held back by the fact that I didn't speak up for myself and what I wanted. I left it to others to recognize me. My male contemporaries were more brash and coasted along on that. Now many younger women are capable of doing that.'

'Young people today are far more aggressive—and I mean that as praise, not criticism,' says Bachi Karkaria. 'They take it for granted that they will rise in the hierarchy. They are not diffident about aiming for whatever they want.'

'They are bright, enthusiastic and on the ball,' says Usha Rai. 'Now that it is possible to get bylines early in the day, they work hard for it and try to move up faster. They have greater incentives and more energy than we did.' She points out that even if the youngsters in the field today lack depth they are bound to acquire it in time.

Contrary to the general feeling that youngsters today are not interested in serious social issues, Rupa Chinai suggests that quite a few of them **are** interested in health issues, women's issues, etc. According to her, 'Many younger reporters **are** making the effort to delve into and understand issues that require a lot of reading and legwork.'

Kashi echoes Minwala (above) when she suggests that more women than men seem to come into the field with certain ideals about wanting to bring about changes in the system. According to her, 'Many of them seriously believe in their work and trust that something positive will come out of what they do in the profession.'

And, as Coomi Kapoor points out, if the young women coming into the field today are not as hardworking as their predecessors, it could be because they do not have to struggle so hard for acceptance. As a result, they may not feel the need to be extra conscientious. Rita Manchanda agrees: 'They don't have to fight as much because many battles have already been won.' On the other hand, Olga Tellis believes this is in many ways a disadvantage. 'It is true that there is no need to struggle any more. But when that ingredient is absent, something is definitely missing,' she says.

Lack of Leadership

Chinai suggests that the real problem lies in the vacuum in terms of leadership, with young people not receiving enough nurture, support or ideas from seniors in the profession. Manini Chatterjee also points out that 'Younger reporters need to be sensitized.'

A number of young women in the profession confirm that they receive little help from their seniors. According to Anuradha Shah, reporter, *The Indian Express*, Pune, 'The older generation thinks we've got it easy. I think senior people should give us guidance but they don't. I don't know whether they are unwilling to give advice and help because of the competition or because of the pressure of their own careers.'

Apart from such differences in perception, it is clear that the stereotype of the younger generation of journalists as brash, arrogant go-getters is based primarily on trends in Delhi and, to a lesser extent, Mumbai. While some of the characteristics attributed to the new crop in these cities may be shared by their contemporaries in other parts of the country, many are clearly not. Similarly, young women in other places seem to exhibit certain tendencies which are usually not associated with their age group in Delhi and Mumbai.

On the whole, young women outside of the media capitals seem to invite less criticism. Many older women elsewhere have only praise for the new generation. According to Indrani Raimedhi, for example, 'They are ambitious, open to ideas and eager to take risks.'

S. Urmila Majumdar thinks the younger women in the press today are bright, lively, well-read and, most importantly, human. She does not find them excessively ambitious or hard-nosed but has hope that they will be able to bring about necessary changes in the profession. 'They have their heads screwed on tight and are conscious of their rights,' she says. 'They are aware of things even if they choose not to protest now, which is wise.'

Deepal Trivedi believes that the youngsters entering the field today are more professional than she was when she came into journalism just seven years ago. According to her, 'Young people today know what they want and are sincere, committed, skilled and talented. They have no barriers regarding assignments.'

Others see their positive points outweighing any negative ones. According to Sushila Ravindranath, 'The women coming into journalism now are far more focussed and sure of what they want. They are often better qualified, too. In our time, many of us sort of stumbled into the profession.' At the same time, she admits, they don't have to work as hard because information is now much more easily available and accessible.

Sandhya Taksale admits that young women today do not seem to be as concerned about women's issues as in her time. 'But,' she says, 'they are definitely competent, sincere and professional. They look on it as a career, not a pastime.'

Cultural Differences

Local culture obviously plays a major role in moulding the personalities and attitudes of the younger generation. As Dasgupta puts it, 'In Calcutta, there may be some brashness but not as much as in places like Delhi. Calcutta is more subdued and subtle.' Shikha Mukherjee agrees: 'Cultural factors play important role. Youngsters abide by certain norms of behaviour and interaction. For example, here they attach the respectful suffix "di" to the names of older and more experienced women in the profession.'

According to her, '90 per cent of the young women in the Calcutta press corps seem to be extremely hesitant, willing to conform to, and function within, the gender stereotype. They seem to be happy doing soft stories and features. I can't think of any who are developing into the leaders of the so-called brat-pack in political journalism. Most of them seem to be reluctant to push themselves forward and attract attention. Maybe they don't want to risk receiving negative attention. I can't recall any young woman asking questions at a press conference. They seem content to take the back seat. It's disconcerting.'

According to Navata, in the Telugu press, too, most young women lack the professional touch: 'They take their jobs for granted and handle it in a mechanical way, just like their male counterparts. They seem to prefer subbing to active journalism. They magnify the problem of night duty, which enables managements to justify not hiring more women.' Similarly, Smita Sitaram, senior sub-editor, *The Indian Express*, Hyderabad, says, 'There are more women than men on the *Express* desk now, but most of them are docile and willing to be driven. They seem to have no complaints.'

Parvathy Devi R says most of the women entering the field in Kerala today are concentrating on cultural, social subjects and have no political perspective at all. According to her, the docility of young women in Kerala is exacerbated by the attitudes of young men in the state which she says are getting worse than ever, especially in terms of gender.

While the high turnover of journalists of both sexes in Delhi and Mumbai is attributed to ambition, the high dropout rate among women journalists in other places is often linked to their lack of seriousness about their careers. According to R.Akhileshwari, although more women are joining Hyderabad's press corps, there is also a high dropout rate among them. On the other hand, many young women in the city cite the impermanency and insecurity of employment in the Telugu press as a major factor leading them to contemplate career changes. In addition, many of them say their families, too, are keen on their opting for jobs which offer more security, pay and status.

Dasgupta attributes the high turnover, especially of sub-editors, in Calcutta to the tough working hours demanded by the profession, which lead to tension within their families and tend to preclude any social life except with other journalists. She may be right because a number of youngsters in the city mention the time-consuming nature of the profession as a stumbling block which may lead them to opt for careers with easier and more regular working hours, such as teaching. As one of them puts it, 'One can't cope with such timings in the long term.'

Caught in a Bind

Meanwhile, young journalists point out that they often find themselves between the devil and the deep sea with respect to the nature and content of their work. Contrary to the general impression, quite a few of them do see journalism as a vocation and believe the media should play a proactive role to bring about progressive changes in society. But, in today's circumstances, such a view often entails swimming against the tide.

According to Dionne Bunsha, 'Many of us are quite idealistic. I joined the press because I found that there are biases in the media, with some issues not being reflected at all. I thought I could correct this. I realized that I would have to work within a limited framework but I felt that, at least within that space, I could change things.' But that is easier said than done when the priorities of the press are increasingly going in the opposite direction.

Some take a pragmatic position. According to Minwala, 'You have to maintain a balance. It makes sense to play the game cleverly. You have to do what is expected of you and also the other things that you *want* to do.' She thinks she may be considered a bit of a sell-out because she enjoys doing light pieces, too.

Others find maintaining the balance increasingly difficult. As Saloni Meghani says, 'The pressures are much greater now. Today's society is really demanding. You are inundated with images of success. Even your sense of self-worth depends on how much you are earning, how successful you are, etc.' Under the circumstances, she thinks it is a disadvantage to be too idealistic because it can lead to greater disillusionment. 'You need to remember it's a job,' she says.

Some of the problems associated with the new generation can perhaps be addressed at the level of the journalism courses most youngsters today undergo before entering the field. While some universities have long had degree courses in journalism and a few well-known private institutions have run diploma courses for many years, now there are many more options and some kind of course is available in practically every major city in the country and even some minor towns.

Journalism Training

Women began to avail the opportunities for journalism training provided by various universities and other institutes in different parts of the country as far back as in the 1960s. Over the decades there has been a significant rise both in the number of journalism schools and in the number of women entrants. This is in keeping with trends almost everywhere in the world.

According to a 1987 article by Sima Sharma et al, in 1962 there were four women students in a class of sixteen in the journalism department of Nagpur University. In 1964, *The Times of India's* journalist trainee scheme had three women among the ten apprentices. By 1985, the *Times* Research Foundation's School of Journalism had an equal number of girls and boys (13 each).[1]

Some newspaper groups have even started their own courses and training programmes. The training scheme run by *The Times of India* in Mumbai for a long time was for a few years replaced by a journalism course run by a foundation set up by the group; however the course has since been wound up. The Goenka Foundation associated with the *Indian Express* group had launched the Asian College of Journalism in Bangalore. In Hyderabad, there is an Eenadu School of Journalism, while in Thiruvananthapuram the Deepika group has its own Institute of Journalism and Media Management.

In addition, professional associations have initiated courses in some parts of the country. Apart from the quasi-governmental press academies in various states which conduct regular courses, some organizations of journalists occasionally undertake training, sometimes in collaboration with other institutions.

In most places the percentage of women taking these courses has been steadily increasing. Asha Patel reports that women outnumber men in the journalism department of Rajasthan University. The editor of a Marathi newspaper claims that 60-80 per cent of journalism students in Mumbai are women, while 40 per cent of those in Pune are female.

According to an article on post-graduate courses in journalism in the Bangalore edition of *The Hindu* last year,' ... one striking feature is the growing number of women students. They have, on most occasions, outnumbered men in the classes. Agrees Ms C.K. Meena, a staffer at the Asian College of Journalism: "The number of girl students has been growing since the college started two years ago. In fact, a majority of the last batch are girls." Meena suggests—only partly in jest—that reservations for men may be required in the near future.'[2]

The article also points out that the only undergraduate degree courses in journalism in the city (strangely titled 'Communicative English') are offered by three women's colleges; only one co-educational college has journalism as an optional subject in its Bachelor of Arts course. Similarly, three women's colleges affiliated to Delhi University offer courses in journalism. Reports from elsewhere, too, suggest that journalism courses are more widely available and that the percentage of girls taking them is on the rise everywhere. On a recent visit to Bangalore University's Department of Communications, I found that women made up about two-thirds of its journalism students.

However, not all of them seem to enter the profession. Journalists working in different parts of the country suggest that part of the reason is the paucity of job opportunities for women in many sections of the press, particularly the vernacular press. For instance, Navata points out that there are women students in the journalism diploma course conducted by Andhra University in Vishakapatnam. But, she asks, 'Where will they get jobs? Academic qualifications don't seem to necessarily help.'

Similarly, Gangopadhyay reports that while women are flooding the various journalism courses available in Gujarat, the local press remains resistant to the recruitment of women. Preethy A.M. also says, 'Girls join classes but after completing the course they don't seem to join the profession.' She is not sure whether this is because the press is not open to hiring women or because society has not fully accepted journalism as an appropriate career for women.

According to Rekha Shashidharan, who teaches in the Department of Journalism, University of Thiruvananthapuram, the percentage of women in journalism courses in Kerala is still relatively small. 'While 80-90 per cent of the students taking botany or zoology are girls, the opposite is true in the case of journalism. For some reason, here the press is still considered female-unfriendly. Even those who do the course often don't take up a job in journalism. It may have something to do with the negative messages they get from teachers, including guest lecturers from the profession, and the comments and attitudes they encounter among classmates. It's difficult to really pin down the reason but something certainly seems to discourage them.'

Most women in the profession say the technical know-how with which youngsters from most of the good, professional courses emerge is much better than it used to be. However, there is some scepticism about how well they prepare students for the real world of journalism.

Inadequate Preparation

In some cases, it is a question of inadequate preparation for the pressures and practical difficulties they are likely to encounter in this career. According to Anita Anand, many of the interns she comes across, from various training institutes, cannot handle the work they are required to do. 'My hunch is that about 70 per cent of these journalism students drop out of the profession,' she says.

She believes it is very important for institutions offering such courses to pay special attention to the need to groom young women for professional life in general and the pressures of journalism in particular. 'I think communications schools need to have separate sessions for women students,' she says. 'It's a myth that there is no difference between men and women. For women there is a constant struggle to balance the often conflicting demands of the home and children and the job. They need help to learn how to juggle the various aspects of their lives. They also need training in goal-setting, negotiation skills, and so on. At the moment they get very little leadership and guidance.'

Apart from this, there seems to be a major lacuna in the philosophical and ethical underpinnings of most of these courses. While there is great stress on the development of technical skills—including computer-based writing, editing and production—less attention seems to be paid to providing students with a vision of the social, political and cultural role of the press in society and a critical insight into the economics, structures and modes of functioning of the press today.

It is the exceptional course which forces students to think about the press in the context of society and, thereby, encourages them to decide what they want to do as journalists. It may not be entirely coincidental that several of the idealistic young women I met in Mumbai have emerged from one of the rare media courses which still promotes the concept of journalism as public service: the Social Communications Media course offered by the Sophia College Polytechnic.

Unfair Criticism

A few journalists, who recognize some of the drawbacks of the new generation in the field today, still believe it is unjust to pass a verdict on them so early in the day. According to Bhavna Somaiya, 'The younger lot are ambitious, even though their output doesn't always match their ambition. They are not as diligent in their work or as persistent in their efforts as they ought to be. This is reflected in the quality of their writing. At the same time, they are attractive because they have tremendous zest and a great sense of adventure. You can't dominate them. You have to motivate them. In any case, it is not fair to judge them at this raw stage. Every older generation feels that it was better.'

Kausilya Santanam, senior sub-editor, *The Hindu*, Chennai, agrees that each generation feels the next one is not as good. She points out that many young women in the field today are bright and enthusiastic. According to her, the brashness exhibited by some youngsters today is probably due to the fact that most of them are pampered at home. She thinks quite a few come from single child families and believes this is why 'They want everything too quickly.'

Swati Bhattacharjee points out that the profession now demands racy articles, swiftly done. She admits that a number of aspiring journalists, just out of college, want to take the easy route into the field. According to her, only one out of six is willing to rework articles into an acceptable shape. However, she says, 'Quite a few good people are coming into journalism, especially the English press. The older women in the field, who had to put in extra work to be accepted, continue to expect younger people to go through the same process.'

End-notes

The generation gap is very much in evidence in the discussion on the characteristics and prospects of the new entrants to the world of journalism. This is, perhaps, inevitable.

Looking back, I am sure that many of us who now comprise the middle-aged—if not older—generation came across as fairly brash ourselves at the beginning of our careers. I can see now that we, too, thought we knew it all. Today I marvel at how tolerant and accommodating Gulshan Ewing, then editor of *Eve's Weekly*, was of our grand and impatient efforts to usher in a brave new world of women's magazines. I realize that if we managed to fulfil at least half of our ambitious dreams for the magazine, it was because she was gracious enough to give us the freedom and space to experiment.

In any case, the 'brat pack' phenomenon is largely restricted to the English press and most evident (perhaps expectedly) in Delhi, followed by Mumbai and, to some extent, Bangalore. In other places, even the natural brashness of youth seems to be tempered, if not altogether squashed, by the overall culture of the local press and society. Also, as many journalists acknowledge, the negative qualities associated with many youngsters in the press today are clearly linked to recent changes in both the profession and society as a whole.

Clearly, if large sections of the new generation of young people, including some of those coming into journalism today, are self-absorbed and committed to nothing but self-interest, the responsibility for breeding the species must surely lie with the older generation and with the society, as well as the profession, they have created.

Still, some of the paths reportedly being taken by young women in the field today, voluntarily or otherwise, may bode ill for the future of women in the profession. They threaten to undo the gains for which several older generations have fought—chief among them the respect they have won as serious, competent, full-fledged professionals capable of excelling in all branches of journalism through sheer hard and good work.

Perhaps the key to the resolution of some of these issues lies in journalism education, especially since many senior people within the profession seem to be abdicating their responsibilities towards the new generation, especially in terms of orientation and training.

Although UNESCO data puts the percentage of female students in journalism and mass communications courses in India at less than thirty—a surprisingly low figure for 1992—reports from across the country suggest that it is much higher. Nevertheless, studies by UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), AMIC (the Asian Media, Information and Communication Centre) and several other bodies suggest that there is still a gap here, as elsewhere, between the number of women who receive communication education and the number working in the media.[3]

What is more, many of the existing courses leave much room for improvement. While there is now some stress, at least in the better courses, on making students technically proficient, few seem to help young people think about the role of the media as a powerful social, cultural and, indeed, political institution and about their role as professional members of this institution. Even fewer have gender sensitization as part of the curriculum. Almost none of them attempts to provide students with skills that would enable them to think through their choices and negotiate their way around pitfalls and obstacles so that they are able to do and achieve what they wish to in their careers.

If all this were done, either by journalism educators or by experienced colleagues in the profession, many more young people would be able to avoid some of the negative characteristics and unfortunate trends now associated with the new generation.

12

Nurturing Networks

Professional associations of women can play a nurturing role. Women in the media wear many different hats and have to make many hard choices. It is nice to sink into an atmosphere of shared experiences and learn from each other.

Shahnaz Anklesaria Aiyar

Once upon a time, many moons ago, journalists used to belong to trade unions within individual press establishments, as well as the umbrella organizations that exist at the city, state and even national levels. Today, with the changed circumstances in the newspaper industry, most unions are in a decline in terms of both membership and influence, each reinforcing the dwindling of the other.

Even at the best of times, the majority of women in journalism were not very active in professional unions. Union leaders often complained that women were reluctant to become members, let alone to participate in union activities. But, according to some women who have played leadership roles in unions, the reasons for women's low participation in union affairs had a great deal to do with the structures and styles of functioning adopted by these organizations.

'Men have more leisure for trade union activites,' says Ratnamala, once vice chairperson of the Newspaper Employees' Coordination Committee in Andhra Pradesh. 'In fact, the TU movement is dominated by affluent men. Even if women are interested in participating, they can't afford the time. This is not just because of their own multiple responsibilities. It is also because men tend to waste time at meetings—not coming to the point, postponing things, and so on. Women can't cope with that sort of thing. Then the men complain about women not joining the union and not being active in it.'

According to her, the attitudes of many union leaders also prevent women from participating fully in union activities. She cites the instance of one leader who used to discourage even women office-bearers from attending meetings. He felt it was not appropriate for women to sit around in 'Irani hotels' late in the evening and told them they would be better off going home. This is despite the fact that the women who were active in the union used to stay late for gate meetings and other such occasions, she points out. In other words, they were welcome to participate in protests but not in decision-making. There was, of course, no question of holding meetings at more 'appropriate' venues or hours in order to facilitate women's participation.

In addition, she says, the atmosphere in union offices is not always comfortable for women. For example, in the 1970s, when there was no press club in Hyderabad, the union office apparently doubled up as a hang-out used for drinking, gambling and other such leisure-time pursuits. According to Ratnamala, it was only after she criticized the practice and asked for at least one room to be kept free of such activities that this concession was made.

Unions have not been noted for taking up the special problems faced by women in the profession either. In fact, they have sometimes even worked against their interests. For example, when *Eenadu* became one of the first Telugu papers to employ a significant number of women, it was reportedly the union which stipulated that they must not be taken into reporting.

Inhibiting Factors

Women's relationships with journalists' unions is inhibited by other factors, too. For instance, says Preeti Mehra, features editor, *Business Line*, New Delhi, 'Many women hesitate to go to unions with problems regarding sexual harassment and/or other issues because of the very public manner in which matters are usually handled by these organizations. Not everyone can take that kind of pressure and the inevitable gossip, especially in cases involving sexual harassment.'

The likely professional repercussions of trade union activity have also kept women away from active involvement in unions, especially at times and in places where their very presence in the press has been or is precarious. Vasanthalakshmi reached the highest peak a woman has scaled in the Telugu press when she became news editor of *Udayam* in 1990. However, she believes her promotion was delayed primarily because of her involvement in the setting up of the newspaper union and the agitation for the implementation of the government-appointed wage board's recommendations on pay scales.

E. Mani seems to be one of the few women in journalism currently active in a professional union. In 1996 she independently stood for election to the state council of the Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists and later became a member of its executive committee. She took the initiative to form a women journalists' committee within the APUWJ in June 1997 and is currently its co-convenor.

Thanks largely to her special efforts to mobilize women, including travel to publishing centres outside Hyderabad, the number of women turning up at meetings is apparently growing, albeit slowly. In September 1997 the committee organized a seminar on women and the media in association with the state's quasi-governmental Press Academy. The event was attended by women journalists from different parts of AP as well as some representatives of local women's groups.

According to Mani, among the issues being pursued by the committee now are the common problems faced by women journalists in the state, particularly those relating to recruitment, confirmation, promotion, wages and statutory benefits such as maternity leave. The committee has also asked the state government to institute a special state award for women journalists and to ensure that women are represented in the state and district level committees dealing with press accreditation. In addition, it has asked the Press Academy, which conducts journalism courses, to include classes on issues relating to the media and women.

Several journalists from Jaipur say they are members of the Journalists' Association of Rajasthan (JAR). There are conflicting reports about the existence of a separate cell for women within JAR and an independent forum for women journalists in Jaipur. Nevertheless, while some women have found it useful to be members of professional fora such as JAR, others say they have not. But quite a few women express support for the concept of a special platform for women in journalism.

According to Balwinder Kaur, membership in a professional association fosters a sense of unity. As a member of JAR, she says, she has become aware of some of the problems faced by fellow journalists. She believes this will help her anticipate possible problems in the future and learn how to tackle them. On the other hand, Kusum Bapna, staff journalist, *Rajasthan Patrika*, Jaipur, points out that active participation in an association requires time and most working women do not have any time to spare.

Meanwhile, there is another fledgling forum for women journalists in Hyderabad, besides the women's committee of the APUWJ. The group is of recent origin and still in the process of evolving a specific character and agenda. However, it has managed to secure space within the premises of the local press club. According to members, this can be used for the collective purpose of meeting and talking with each other and/or special invitees, as well as the individual purpose of having a relatively comfortable place to wait or rest beween appointments and/or assignments.

The Ahmedabad-based Media Women's Forum (Gujarat) is now some years and a number of programmes old. According to its introductory leaflet, some time in March 1996 'a group of women media professionals realized that while they were busy knitting the world together along information highways, the distance between them and their own breed had grown.' The objectives of the forum are: to create a platform for media professionals (from both print and audio-visual media) to exchange ideas and provide information updates; to make way for interaction within and outside the group; to organize programmes to promote professional abilities; to dispel myths and misconceptions about the profession and encourage more women to step into the field.

The leaflet, brought out in 1997, lists the programmes organized by the forum to date: a discussion on women's participation in the political process, a seminar on the history of women's writing in Gujarat, a lecture series on 'the role of the media in the changing scenario' and a state-level seminar on 'women and media in the twenty-first century'.

Early Efforts

These new initiatives are reminiscent of similar groups that existed in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and possibly elsewhere in the 1980s. One of the first was an informal group of women journalists and activists interested in media-related issues, who got together in the capital to look at and, when necessary, protest against the portrayal of women in the media, particularly films and advertisements.

The Women and Media Group, Mumbai, formed in 1985, was also a loose and independent collective comprising women working in all the media as well as advertising. It functioned primarily as a meeting ground for media women, where professional, social and ethical issues relating to women and the media could be discussed. The idea was to promote better understanding within the group and to provide a base for more effective advocacy on these issues from within the mass media.

Among the activities taken up by the group were: an investigative report on the violent caste and communal disturbances in Ahmedabad in 1985, focussing particularly on women's perspectives on, and involvement in, the crisis, as well as the impact on women of the prolonged violence and curfew in the city; discussion papers on the relationship between women journalists and feminist activists/ researchers and on women and television, presented at the National Conference on Perspectives for the Autonomous Women's Movement (Mumbai, 1985); a survey-based paper on the experiences and position of women journalists in India, presented at the National Conference for Women's Studies (Chandigarh, 1986); a special edition of the journal, *Countermedia*, on women and/in/on the media (1987); a tie-up with an activist women's group in Bangalore to protest against a new, vapid television programme for women on Doordarshan; advocacy on 'the Shah Bano case', which involved the question of maintenance after divorce for Muslim women; talks on different aspects of the women-media question by people from various related fields; and occasional letters to the editor highlighting instances of sexism in the media.

With the formation of the Women and Media Committee of the Mumbai Union of Journalists around 1987, the earlier group decided to merge with it (although this meant the sacrifice of its broad-based nature). Among the early activities of the committee were: a survey on working conditions in newspaper establishments, with particular reference to night shifts, transport, toilet facilities, etc.; an investigative report on the Roop Kanwar 'sati' incident in Deorala, together with an analysis of the press coverage of the tragedy and its aftermath; special press meets with visiting public figures; and regular talks and film screenings.

Bangalore also had a Media Women's Forum in the late 1980s, comprising women from the print as well as the audio-visual media. The group used to meet in the local press club and eventually managed to get a room with a separate toilet within its premises. Apart from inviting interesting visitors to the city for talks, the group brought out reports on the adoption scenario in Bangalore in the light of the Supreme Court's guidelines on inter-country adoption and the controversy over a religious festival in Karnataka involving worship in the nude by women.

Capital Controversy

The Indian Women's Press Corps, based in Delhi, was formed in 1994. Its *raison d'étre* is outlined in the preface of its first publication, a report on the widowed survivors of the 1984 massacre of Sikhs in the capital: 'The IWPC is a professional body of women journalists working in the English, Hindi and regional language media. It aims at promoting the cause of healthy journalism while simultaneously also providing a meeting ground for women journalists from all over the country. Its headquarters, we hope, will grow into a place where they can meet each other, listen to, and interact with, eminent speakers and specialists from various fields and, in time, also have access to facilities such as a library, a resource centre and a creche.'

While the library and resource centre are already functioning, the idea of a creche has been abandoned for the present, apparently because it was found that most women prefer childcare facilities closer to their homes.

Interestingly, the formation of the IWPC provoked strong reactions within the capital's press corps, as indicated by the sarcastic preface to its second publication, *Between Bylines: Women Journalists Report on their Times*. Criticism came not only from male colleagues but even a few women in the profession, who have refused to have anything to do with it. Among the latter, some are simply opposed to the concept of a gender-segregated professional association. Others are particularly allergic to the fact that the premises currently being used by the IWPC has been provided by the government, ostensibly because one member was able to persuade the prime minister of the day to sanction the allotment of a lovely, centrally located bungalow as a club house.

Tavleen Singh is not a member of the IWPC. 'Feminism is an outdated idea,' she says, although the IWPC does not claim to be a feminist organization. But, more importantly, she believes it is 'outrageous' to accept favours from the government and make use of the extraordinary political contacts of some women in the profession. According to her, journalists cannot be fair under such circumstances. Raising a different issue, Shiraz Sidhwa wonders about the need for segregation, suggesting that it may have been better to work through the existing press club.

However, Usha Rai, a founder-member of the IWPC, questions the legitimacy of the attack on the new institution. She points out that there are several associations of journalists in the capital, whose right to separate existence has never been similarly challenged. She also draws attention to the routine practice of governments—at the state as well as central levels—to provide various facilities to members of the press, including subsidized housing, which few within the profession refuse or protest against.

Also, she points out, many women are not comfortable with the atmosphere in the existing press club. 'Not everyone in the profession is "modern" and 'liberated'," she says. 'Many are shy and reserved and would feel out of place in the atmosphere that prevails at the press club. They don't have many opportunities to meet colleagues outside their offices. The IWPC gives them a chance to interact with other journalists and helps to draw them out.'

According to Kalyani Shankar, also a founder-member and the first president of the IWPC, the original idea was to form a professional body that would facilitate and improve women's access to newsmakers and experts in various fields. As she points out, all journalists do not have equal opportunity to interact with well-known people who can equip them with useful background information and insights. 'The idea was not to promote segregation,' she says.

Coomi Kapoor, another founder-member, says the other purpose of the IWPC was 'to provide a core support group, a kind of women's club, for women in the press.' 'This profession is very stressful,' she points out. 'It's hard to find time for one's family, let alone oneself. Many women have difficult personal lives. They find some relief in the company of women colleagues who face similar problems.' She admits, however, that this role is not yet being fulfilled to the optimal extent.

As Shahnaz Anklesaria Aiyar points out, such professional groups can play a nurturing role, helping women to cope with the multiple roles they play and the difficult choices they often have to make through the sharing of experiences and perspectives. 'Why scoff at that need?' she asks. 'Society has to recognize the many roles women have to play and the tensions they face in the process.'

Manini Chatterjee also believes that professional support groups are necessary. She thinks men, too, could be part of such groups. But, she points out, before the IWPC was formed, the press club did not have a single woman on its managing committee. Some women propose that it would have been better to try to remedy that situation from within. But it is clear that the impetus for a separate association came at least partly from the male domination of common professional spaces, which has created a culture which not all women can identify with and which generally doesn't take into account the realities of women's lives.

As Kshama Sharma points out, 'The IWPC has started a library, organized summer camps for children, and so on. The press club never thought about such things all these years.' In fact, the women's initiative has reportedly triggered some positive changes in this direction within other press fora, including the local press club.

Chatterjee believes there is an additional justification for a platform such as the IWPC: 'Women have to play a catalyst role in addressing the problems of working people.' Although problems like prolonged working hours and the absence of childcare facilities are not just women's issues, she says, women are more likely to initiate discussion, if not action, on them.

Some women who had initial reservations about a separate forum for women have now changed their minds. For example, Padma Alva believes that women in the profession should assert themselves as journalists first. However, she admits that the IWPC has turned out to be a worthwhile experiment, bringing people together and taking up various issues.

Sevanti Ninan cites a practical reason for being happy about the existence of the IWPC: 'There is a lot of hanging around to be done in journalism. Accredited journalists can hang around in official press facilities, such as the press lounges in various government buildings but freelancers need a base in town.'

Several people appreciate the library and computer facilities now available in the IWPC, as well as the camaraderie and sense of community that it fosters. Another of its positive features is the fact that it brings together women from the English and the Hindi press, as well as women from different branches of journalism, who otherwise do not have many opportunities to get to know and interact with each other. The club also provides fairly good food, with a home-cooked flavour, at a reasonable price and in a congenial environment.

Unfortunately, the IWPC has not yet lived up to its national-sounding name and remains, by and large, a Delhi-centric organization. For example, Vishakapatnam-based Navata says, 'I have heard of the IWPC in Delhi but I don't know the address.' However, she believes that 'some kind of national level coordination of women journalists is required to change the patriarchal ways in which news is reported and presented, improve media images of women and democratize the media.'

Only a few journalists scattered in the various metropolitan cities have actually heard of the IWPC, usually through personal contacts, while fewer still have become members. This is partly because it is not yet clear what it offers to outstation members and how they can participate in its activities.

Felt Need

Nevertheless, there is little doubt that many women across the country would welcome a professional association in which they can play an active part. If the large number of women working as journalists in the capital city, with all its other fora and facilities, feel the need for a special space of this sort, it is hardly surprising that most women elsewhere are all for it. The need is perhaps felt most acutely by those functioning in difficult circumstances and/or in relative isolation. Journalists in Ahmedabad and Hyderabad have already taken the initiative to come together. In other places, too, many young women say they would like to have such an option.

For instance, in Kerala, Vineetha Gopi says, 'It would be good to have a women journalists' group.' Kareena B Thangamam, too, thinks 'It is necessary to bring women journalists together to deal with the problems we face.' In fact, says Parvathy Devi R, media women in Thiruvananthapuram are already beginning to think in terms of forming such a collective.

According to Julian D'Costa, 'There is no existing forum for women journalists in Goa but I would be a member if there was one.' Even in Mumbai, where the once-active groups seem to have become dormant, if not extinct, Smruti Koppikar says, 'I still see room for a Women and Media Group type of forum.'

Going by the experiences of groups that have existed in the past and those that have come into being more recently, such platforms can and do serve certain obvious purposes, to a greater or lesser extent. Among them are: building a sense of community and fostering a sense of belonging for women in the profession; providing them with professional opportunities not readily and individually available to everyone; and creating a forum to address the specific problems faced by women within the press, as well as broader, public issues related to women and the media.

However, if these groups are to fulfil their potential and become real support systems for women in the press, they probably need to be more focussed about their role, taking a cue from women's actual experiences in, and perspectives on, the profession. For instance, many young women in the field say they receive little guidance and support from seniors in the profession. At the same time, many older women seem more than willing to enable youngsters to benefit from their longer experience. If this process does not take place naturally in every workplace, professional women's fora can surely play an effective role in facilitating it under their auspices and thereby promoting the concept of mentoring.

Similarly, a number of women in the field, especially younger women, complain about the disadvantages of not being able to hang around and fraternize with news sources the way their male colleagues can. Professional women's associations can easily provide an acceptable platform for social interaction between female journalists and news sources in various fields. This could, in turn, provide the basis and set the terms for further professional interaction at the individual level (which most journalists would naturally want).

Another area in which professional associations can play a role is in providing a relatively private space where women can discuss problems like professional or sexual harassment. This would, at the very least, help them to realize that they are not alone in facing such situations and to learn from each other's experiences about the various approaches to handling them. At present many women seem to feel helpless and isolated. They are often stuck beween the devil and the deep sea: families that do not approve of careers in the media in the first place and would be happy if they gave up their jobs, and employers who are still tentative about recruiting women and would certainly not like to rock the editorial boat on their account.

Two other, possibly related, situations clearly call for intervention from professional women's associations. One is the fact that the reportedly high representation of women in journalism courses is not reflected in the number of women working in the press in most places. The other is the continuing high turnover and dropout rates among women who do join the profession.

If, as some people suggest, female journalism students receive discouraging messages from male professors, visiting lecturers and/ or classmates (at least in certain parts of the country), organised interaction with women already in the profession could encourage more young women to enter the field. If the local press remains resistant to the recruitment of women, a professional association of women may be able to persuade recalcitrant organizations to move with the times.

Similarly, such groups can take a lead in addressing the issues that cause many women to drop out of the profession sooner or later. On the one hand, they can play a useful role in helping women learn how to effectively negotiate the necessary changes in their professional and personal lives so that they can stay on in their jobs. On the other, they can explore ways to humanize media structures and systems so that journalists of both sexes are able to lead more normal lives, paying equal, necessary attention to work, relationships, leisure and the pursuit of other interests.

Anita Anand believes that there is an urgent need for professional associations of women to address such issues, especially because they are not always taken up by other professional bodies. For example, she points out, unions tend to assume that wages and other material benefits are the priority items on the negotiation table. However, it has been found time and again in different parts of the world that, while women certainly want fair wages, they think facilities such as flexitime, job-sharing, more reasonable working hours (all of which have been made easier, thanks to technology), childcare and other support services are equally important.

Similarly, she says, women in the profession do require training to cope with the demands and pressures of the workplace. They need to develop self-confidence as well as specific skills in setting goals, professional negotiation, time management, organization of work, juggling conflicting responsibilities, handling personal and professional relationships and, above all, being assertive and standing up for themselves.

Negative Fallout?

Of course, some journalists are concerned about the possible negative fallout of efforts to bring women in the profession together on a common platform, especially in places where women have not yet established themselves in the press. As Renu Ramanathan says, 'Segregation may not be a good idea when women are just coming up in the field. We need to gain acceptance first.'

Anand acknowledges that it is often important to be 'one of the boys' or, at least, to be perceived that way, especially in the early stages of a career in a male-dominated field. However, she says, playing along with the boys does not necessarily mean forgetting that one is a girl and giving up one's own identity. She believes that if a critical mass of women get into the media and act like the boys for a while, they can later change things to better suit themselves.

There is also the question of how such fora position themselves. There is no denying that good intentions can be misunderstood or even deliberately misrepresented. But the more clear a group is of its *raison d'être* and the more focussed it is in its activities, the less room there would be for apprehension or ridicule. On the other hand, as some women in Hyderabad point out, if a group comes into being without a clearly defined purpose and agenda for action it can easily become the butt of jokes from the outside and give rise to cynicism on the inside.

It is often presumed that the spirit of the self-absorbed 1990s precludes collective endeavours. The demise of many groups that came up in the 1980s reinforces the assumption that the 'megeneration' has no time for others. However, it is encouraging that, even in these cynical times, fresh efforts are being made to bring media women together in different parts of the country. What is even more heartening is the fact that some of these initiatives are spearheaded by young women in the profession.

Equally inspiring is the fact that, even in the absence of any formal organization, individual journalists and groups of professionals are taking the initiative to share their experience, knowledge, skills and contacts with others in the field and to encourage more women to get involved in worthwhile professional pursuits.

For example, Sameera Khan was till recently part of an effort to train Muslim women for careers in the media. Similarly, Khan and three other Mumbai-based journalists—Rupa Chinai, Meena Menon and Padma Prakash—recently organized a workshop to familiarize colleagues in the press with issues relating to public health. More such efforts are reportedly in the offing.

All this is in keeping with the trend at the international level, too. In the 1990s alone, several global, regional and national networks of women in the media have emerged in different parts of the world, each with its own specific agenda but all based on the premise that there is strength of different kinds in numbers, however small.

End-notes

The concept of 'sisterhood' has been much maligned of late, sometimes by women in journalism. But it is obviously not a completely outmoded or irrelevant concept even in the so-called post-feminist era represented by the 1990s. Interestingly, several women who, some years ago, would not have been caught dead in a women's organization, are today taking a lead in establishing professional associations of media women.

At a time when trade unions within the press are reportedly in a state of decline, women in the profession seem to be getting together to set up separate platforms to serve a wide range of purposes. While some of the old fora have faded away, new ones are emerging in different places. Even where no such forum exists, many women seem to feel the need for one.

Although professional associations need not be separatist, the exclusively male culture of most existing ones may have prompted women to launch special platforms to fulfil their needs as press persons with some common experiences and perceptions rooted in gender. It is clear that associations of media women can play a major role in enabling more women to become full and equal members of the profession.

Recent studies have revealed that the situation is not very different at the global level. According to Margaret Gallagher, organizing and lobbying are key tactics for women both inside and outside the media in different parts of the world.[1] Similarly, two recent reports by the Washington-based International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) call attention to the importance of networking.

For example, its 1997 report on women in international news points out that 'networking is an integral part of the news world and opportunities to make contacts with potential sources, employers and mentors are highly valued.'[2] In its earlier global survey of women in journalism, the IWMF reported that 'women have already gravitated towards each other, hoping to combat the professional obstacles they face together.'[3] According to the report, 'Many survey respondents agree that networking is among the best solutions.'

Gallagher's 1995 report appends an impressive list of women and media related associations and networks across the world. According to her listing, in addition to six global networks, there are four regional and six national ones in Africa, three regional and ten national ones in Asia, two regional and fourteen national ones in Europe, three regional and four national ones in Latin America and the Caribbean, and one regional and three national ones in Oceania (which includes the island nations of the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand). In her list for North America are three associations in Canada and five in the USA.[4]

The six global networks she identifies are: The International Association for Women in Radio and Television (Sweden), the International Women's Media Foundation (USA), the International Women's Tribune Centre (linked to the UN in New York), Isis International (Philippines), the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (Canada) and the World Association of Women Journalists and Writers (Mexico).

A number of other associations and networks have come into being since 1995. Some time ago I met two founding members of the Romanian Young Journalists' Foundation, which appears to be spearheaded by women. I have also come across references to a Professional Association of Women in Communications in Senegal, a network of Mediterranean Women Journalists and a Mexican Women's Media Network. The latter was launched in 1998 with the help of the IWMF. In 1997 the IWMF also helped set up an African Women's Media Centre—a leadership institute for women in African media.

In addition, an international WomMed/FemMed Network was created by participants in an International Symposium on Women and the Media, organized by UNESCO in Toronto in 1995 in the run-up to the Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing. This network aims to bring together women and men from around the world 'who are working together to redress gender-balance in access to expression and decision-making in the media, reaffirming the importance of fluid and pluralistic communication for women's full participation in society and promoting all forms of democratic communication'.[5] Its goals are 'to carry out and facilitate implementation of the recommendations of the Toronto and the Beijing Platforms for Action at local, national, regional and international levels, as well as to offer mutual support and solidarity between members involved in such endeavours'.

The fact that only a minority of women in the profession are vehemently opposed to such initiatives suggests that networking is an idea whose time has come in India, too, albeit somewhat belatedly!

13

Professional Opinion

It is becoming increasingly difficult to believe in what you are doing and to hold on to what you believe.

Sathya Saran

~ 'News should be light enough to rise like froth.'

—*Newspaper publisher quoted by young journalist.*

~ 'There is no room for bleeding hearts in our organization.'

—*Corporate manager of a newspaper company quoted by journalism student.*

~ 'Environmental activism should be kept out of the office.'

—*Newspaper editor quoted by journalist.*

This may have little to do with gender but many women in journalism seem to be uncomfortable with the turn taken by much of the Indian press from the 1990s onwards, away from seriousness to superficiality and from societal concerns to socialite affairs.

Most senior women agree that, in many ways, the press has backtracked from its dynamic role in the decade beginning in the late 1970s. That was the period when both the media and the public became extra-conscious and vigilant about democracy, justice and human rights, thanks to the brief but traumatic experience of quasi-dictatorship, including censorship, during the Internal Emergency declared by the then prime minister (mid-1975 to early 1977).

Some claim the turning point came in 1994, after two Indian women won international beauty contests within the same year. According to Manimala, the orchestrated excitement over that trumpeted triumph, generated to a considerable extent by the media, totally changed the whole scenario in the press as well as in society. 'The entire focus since then has been on looking beautiful,' she says. 'Poverty and exploitation can't look beautiful. So they are naturally overlooked.'

Others say the change began at the turn of the decade, with the advent of economic liberalization and globalization. These processes brought in their wake a resurgent wave of consumerism—aided and abetted by the media which, in turn, profited from it. As Aditi Kapoor put it in a 1996 article, 'The winds of liberalization indeed swept into media organizations and the philosophy of the market economy with its fundamental principle of free (sic) competition at any cost was readily adopted.'[1]

According to some people, it is the emergence of television as the new opiate of the middle classes, if not the masses, that turned the tide for journalism in India. The new economic policies of the early 1990s coincided with the cultural 'invasion from the skies' in the form of cable-linked satellite television. As audiences came under the spell of television, seemingly mesmerised by the superficiality and glibness of the bulk of the available programming, 'infotainment' became the new buzzword even in the print media.

Significant Shift

In any case, there is no dispute about the fact that a major shift has taken place and that the press in the 1990s is a very different animal from its '80s avatar. There is also little disagreement about what the change has meant in real terms.

According to Madhu Jain, the pressures of mass market competition have led to pressure on journalists to be glib and this, in turn, has resulted in superficial journalism. As Usha Rai puts it, the emphasis today is on 'light, flippant stuff'. Preeti Mehra points out that feature articles, in particular, are expected to be frivolous and consumerism oriented. 'It's the era of soundbite journalism,' says Kalpana Sharma. 'Superficiality is the order of the day.'

According to Pamela Philipose, 'The conscientized approach to journalism is out. It is now seen as old fashioned and out of sync with the times.' Shubha Singh also points out that the earlier sensitivity discernible among journalists, both male and female, has virtually disappeared, if only because it is unappreciated and unfashionable.

Rashmi Saxena, special correspondent, *The Week*, New Delhi, believes that the spaces for writing on issues like human rights, the environment, and so on, are closing up. Ritu Sarin agrees: 'The space and readership for non-glamorous stories is shrinking. The process of globalization and the rise of consumerism are influencing everything.' As Razia Ismail puts it, 'Over the past two or three years, there has been an upsurge in consumerist stuff in the press. The colour pages particularly are full of catchy, popular, superficial pieces. There seems to be far less serious writing in the press today.'

'Over the last four to five years, the trend in the press has definitely been to move away from issues,' says Neerja Chowdhury. 'There is much more focus on subjects of interest to yuppies. It is assumed that the readership is mainly made up of middle class people aspiring to get rich quickly. They are not interested in issues and don't want to be reminded of them in case they begin to feel guilty. The space for coverage of issues has shrunk because the priorities of the press today are different.'

According to Kapoor, the media today serve the interests of the elites almost exclusively: 'The Indian media have become increasingly obsessed with politics, the corporate world, fashion, personalities, 'pop' culture, and the world of entertainment. Scant attention is paid to the problems of living which confront people at the turn of the century...'[2]

Teesta Setalvad believes there is less room in most newspapers today to do a variety of things that were possible in the 1980s. For example, she says, 'As early as in May 1994 the two leading English newspapers in Mumbai stopped covering the Srikrishna Commission investigating the 1992-93 communal violence in the city. When we questioned this, the resident editor of one admitted culpability (and subsequently resumed coverage) but the then RE of the other merely said, "Only you are obsessed with this subject".'

As Setalvad points out, this marks a major departure from the consistent, long-term coverage given by the same papers to the Lentin Commission's inquiry into the mysterious deaths of several patients in a public hospital and the prolonged trial of a former chief minister of Maharashtra in a major corruption case, both in the 1980s.

Similarly, Ayesha Kagal reminisces about the kind of stories she was able to write in the 1970s and '80s, when she was with *The Times of India:* 'In the old days you could go to a place where nothing seemed to be happening on the surface but everything was happening underneath and write a story in five parts.' During that period she was allowed to spend a month researching and writing a story on the Silent Valley. 'The pace was different,' she says.

According to Jyoti Punwani, one of the two journalists (both women) who covered the Srikrishna Commission's work on a daily basis till the bitter end in 1998, 'The whole climate in the press has changed. Issues are certainly less important now.'

Different Priorities

However, socio-economic issues are not the only casualties of the new priorities in the media. Many publications have stopped or reduced serious coverage of literature and the arts. Some do not even publish regular reviews of art exhibitions any more. On the other hand, they provide considerable publicity to the various, emerging forms of popular culture and entertainment.

According to Maitreyi Chatterjee, it is a sign of the times that the book review section of a major Bengali paper was taken out of the Sunday magazine supplement a few years ago to make place for matrimonial advertisements. This was apparently done on the recommendation of the circulation department, which declared that nobody reads anything serious. Says Chatterjee, 'Book reviews are now confined to a weekly half-page in the main paper but they are the first to be thrown out whenever there is a space crunch. All the arts together get a quarter page.'

Today, she says, 'Even when a subject is serious it has to be treated lightly. If you write on women's issues you are not supposed to make any political comments.' According to Rajashri Dasgupta, the advertisement department was responsible for the steady reduction in the number of weekly women's pages in her newspaper (from four to the current one). They pronounced the content 'too serious'.

Sudeshna Basu, who handles the women's supplement of a leading Bengali daily, admits that its cover stories are determined on the basis of what is likely to be attractive to readers and what is, therefore, saleable. 'Problems can't be sold,' she points out. 'The first priority now is that the paper must sell: that is the bottom line.'

According to Chowdhury, this is the primary reason why issues like health, education and child welfare do not get much coverage in the media: 'They can't be sold.' As Kapoor points out, 'The corporate world is very reluctant to buy space or air time which is devoted to news or views about the have-nots and the underprivileged classes.'

Olga Tellis bemoans the fact that 'the whole profession is changing and becoming money-minded.' 'It is sad,' she says, 'that even major newspapers which can well afford to maintain the best traditions of journalism have chosen to merely make more money.' According to her, 'The freedom of the press today belongs to the owners of the press.'

However, Shahnaz Anklesaria Aiyar views the situation differently. 'The people running newspapers today are no doubt less conscious than before of their wider social responsibility,' she says. 'But there is no point glamourizing the past. In those days it made business sense for proprietors to take a confrontational position vis-à-vis the establishment. Proprietors were always motivated by business and profitability. As a journalist, I can and must live with that.'

According to her, 'The difference now is that they want to make even more profits than earlier. They can't run huge empires by bludgeoning too many heads. Increasingly proprietors and editors are thinking only in terms of what they call a market and assuming that they know what this readership wants without really doing any proper surveys. But, at one level, the struggle remains the same. Maybe it is a little harder now, but that doesn't mean it was easy earlier.'

Proactive Publishers

On the other hand, many people affirm that the situation has changed considerably. They point out that proprietors and managements are exercising more control than ever before on editorial matters. As Sevanti Ninan puts it, 'The divide between the management and editorial functions has broken down quite a lot.' According to some journalists, the problem is compounded by the rise of novice publishers who have little relevant knowledge or experience.

In fact, says Amrita Shah, 'Many of the new publishers seem to be more interested in the power and prestige that come with a publication than in running it properly.' According to her, many of them are often unwilling to invest adequate funds in the venture. In addition, she says, they try to convert the professional editors they hire into mere technicians while they enjoy the glamour of being publisher-editors. She believes the new brand of celebrity journalism promoted by even established newspapers props up this trend by providing publicity to the novel breed of publisher-editors, their lifestyles and their parties.

However, an earlier generation of proprietor-editors, who entered the field in the late 1970s or early '80s, played a major role in upgrading many aspects of journalism, including the editorial and production quality of publications. As Anklesaria Aiyar points out, some of them were extremely information-oriented, pioneering the practice of commissioning professional readership surveys as well as public opinion polls. At least one is also known for his micro-management style, looking into every aspect and page of the publication he both publishes and edits.

Tavleen Singh highlights the fact that the same proprietor-editor was the first to spend money on sending journalists out to do on-the-spot reports on events taking place in distant places. Earlier, most publications used to rely on the government, news agencies or stringers—if not outright junkets—for information from far-flung locations. 'I don't agree that the press has changed for the worse,' she says.

She acknowledges that at least one major newspaper, in which the proprietor seems to wield more clout than the editor, is no longer as good as it used to be. But, she points out, if it is actually selling more copies now than before, the management cannot be blamed for thinking it is doing something right. 'I don't think proprietors have taken over everywhere,' she says. 'Some do seem to believe that journalists are not as important as they often think they are. But then there were a lot of pompous editors in the old days.'

According to Mrinal Pande, the situation vis-à-vis publishers is far worse in the Hindi press. 'Many owner-editors belong to a ragtag mob. They have neither professionalism nor social commitment. They are regressive in their attitudes to out-groups, including women. And they are only too willing to oblige various politicians.'

On the other hand, she says, in more professional, large newspaper establishments which publish both English and Indian language publications, managements seem reluctant to publicly identify with their 'language' publications. According to her, 'There is a servants' quarters syndrome in these organizations. Language journalists, like domestic help, are expected to carry out their work quietly, namelessly and facelessly.' She says she stayed on in the Hindi press as long as she could, moving out only when it became impossible to survive with her values and dignity intact.

Unpopular Stands

Many agree that journalists with serious concerns and alternative views about the state of the country and its people are liable to be marginalised in the brave new media world. As Meena Menon points out, only those committed to certain issues, such as the environment, risk being stereotyped as '*jholawala* journalists' (literally shoulder-bag journalists, a pejorative description for those seen as left-leaning and/or 'NGO types'). On the other hand, she says, 'Plugging anybody and anything—including political parties, individual politicians, corporations, capitalists and even the underworld—is not seen as biased. You are labelled only if you take an unpopular position on a developmental issue.' As Sameera Khan puts it, 'There is a right-wing, patriarchal agenda operating in the press today.'

Sharma also believes that particular standpoints on certain issues are more unpopular with newspaper managements than others. As she puts it, 'Right-wing views are all right but not left-wing views.' She points out that while there are still newspapers and magazines in the West that accommodate alternative opinions, in India everybody seems to want to tread the middle ground.

Manini Chatterjee is one of the few who actually gave up a promising career primarily because she could not identify with the stands taken by large sections of the press on a number of issues. She says her decision to quit mainstream journalism in 1992, when she was bureau chief of *The Telegraph* in Delhi, evolved from her growing alienation from the ideology permeating the press.

She traces her politicization to her work as a journalist covering various political parties. As her own political beliefs crystallized, she found that they were in many respects incompatible with the general trends in the press, including her own paper. According to her, while she acknowledged her convictions, the anti-egalitarian ideology propagated by the press in the days of the Mandal and Ayodhya controversies (relating to caste-based affirmative action and the dispute over the site of an ancient mosque, respectively) was not openly declared. 'I felt a misfit,' she confesses. 'I also began to stick out like a sore thumb.'

Significantly, a number of youngsters in the profession are also disturbed by the new trends. As one of them puts it, 'I feel very constrained. The paper's priorities are very different from mine. They don't want stories from outside the city and, above all, they want "sunshine stories"—not what they call "sob stories".'

Another idealistic young woman has been forced to turn cynical about what she can accomplish as a journalist in today's circumstances. According to her, if she suggests an article on a serious issue, even colleagues tell her to stop being boring and predictable. 'Nothing serious, disturbing or even thought-provoking is encouraged. Everything has to be at the level of fun. I have to accept that if I want to keep my job. I need to understand that this is, after all, just a job.'

But a few are determined not to give up. One young reporter admits that the space for writing on development-related issues has shrunk in recent times. She realizes that editors are not in a very strong position today. Nevertheless, she points out, 'It is heartening that none of my stories on such subjects has been killed so far. I may not be asked to cover certain events, like a slum demolition. And such a report wouldn't be missed if it was not there. But once it's written it is usually carried. There is not much encouragement but at least one is not yet actively discouraged.' She believes she must continue working and trying to create spaces in a paper where such issues are not given much importance.

On the other hand, another young journalist seems to have taken her professional cue from the prevailing environment, despite her personal interest in social issues. 'I would rather not get into too much activism,' she says. 'If you are too involved, your bias shows in your writing and people take you less seriously.'

Activist Journalists

Yet, as Chowdhury points out, in the 1970s and '80s, many people working in the media kept in close touch with grassroots movements and organizations. This interaction not only produced some memorable stories but also helped to place several serious human rights issues on the national agenda—among them, hunger, slavery, illiteracy, public health hazards and the continuing oppression and exploitation of disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Some journalists, like Sheila Barse, Olga Tellis and Chowdhury herself, even resorted to public interest litigation to highlight specific issues and ensure justice to people they came across in the course of their professional work.

Barse, a Mumbai-based freelance journalist, filed several petitions on behalf of women prisoners as well as women and children in government-run 'protective homes' in the 1970s and '80s. In a 1982 article on women in journalism in *Eve's Weekly*, she said: 'The main purpose of journalism is to be an activist. The freedom fighters in Indian Independence used to run papers, publish exposés and corruption of all kinds in order to activate a social response.'[3] She has not yet given up this concept. Disturbed by the deaths of several *adivasi* (tribal) children in Maharashtra due to malnutrition not long ago, she filed a petition seeking information about, and redressal for, Korku communities reeling under the onslaught of hunger and illness.

'Activist journalist is too pompous a term,' says Tellis, 'but I don't mind being seen as biased in favour of justice. After all, there is such a thing as right or wrong. When I filed the case concerning pavement dwellers in the Supreme Court, I wanted to demonstrate that our Constitution was written for the propertied classes and has nothing in it for those who do not own property. The SC had to admit that the Constitution does not establish housing as a fundamental right.'

Today journalists who take strong positions on issues of justice risk derision, if not marginalization. They are often referred to as crusading, campaigning or 'committed' journalists or even 'Mother Teresas of the press'. But, according to Seema Mustafa, 'There is nothing wrong with cause journalism. In a developing country you can't be totally objective. In any case, there's nothing like complete objectivity. If you are covering an atrocity against Dalits, you can't deal with it as just a question of who hurled the first stone—you have to go into the background. Whether you're covering communal, caste or ethnic violence, you invariably find that trouble is never started by the oppressed, even if the particular incident you're reporting on may have been sparked off by something they did.'

According to her, idealism, vision and commitment are missing from the press today. Kamla Mankekar agrees. 'Journalism is not a mission any more,' she says. 'Journalists are no longer social reformers. What sells is what is wanted and vice versa. As a result, social issues are neglected—even major, pressing issues that confront the nation such as literacy and family planning.' As Tanushree Gangopadhyay puts it, 'News is now a product that has to be well packaged. The press seems to have forgotten its goals and chosen to abdicate its responsibility.'

If the spirit of the press has undergone change, so has its letter (quite literally). Almost everyone agrees that professional standards have slipped drastically in recent years. As Sharma points out, 'Even readers now comment on the low standards of language as well as everything else in the press.'

Inevitable Change

However, Dina Vakil sees the recent changes in the focus of the press as inevitable and no different from media trends elsewhere. 'The entry of television, particularly satellite television, has put a lot of pressure on newspaper managements,' she explains. 'For the first time, publishers have had to begin thinking about reinventing their newspapers. The natural tendency at first is to try and do what television is doing, to beat them at their own game. But later it becomes clear that newspapers can't do that because they lack the speed and the visuals. It is obviously better to build on the inherent strengths of the newspaper.'

She points out that the so-called Murdochisation of the press is a global phenomenon. 'The success Rupert Murdoch has achieved through pricing strategies, reducing the role of the editor in shaping his papers, and so on, has had an impact on the press all over the world,' she admits. 'Marketing is a fact of life now. You cannot discount its role in selling newspapers. Of course, you cannot sell a bad product effectively either. In any case, as an editor, you have to know the thinking in the corporate environment you work in and put it into action. My role is an editorial role. But I have to see how best I can carry forward the growth strategies that are important to the company—with integrity and professionalism.'

Anita Anand is also pragmatic about the situation. 'If you want to sell something to anybody, it has to be something they want,' she said, speaking at a December 1997 seminar on women in media in Mumbai.[4] 'You have to adjust to the commercial market. It is not so much the themes or the actual content that publishers have trouble with. It is the style in which it is written. If we want to survive in the mainstream media we will have to accept that there is not going to be much space for very serious stuff. We can't expect too much.'

Anjali Mathur also suggests that certain realities have to be recognized. 'Today newspapers can't afford to be anti-establishment,' she says. 'Nor can they run on circulation alone. With costs so high, the only way a paper can keep going is through advertising. Currently there is an advertisement crunch because many more media are competing for advertising and many new avenues have opened up for marketing. When it comes to getting the few available ads, circulation does matter. So does the composition of the readership, especially in terms of buying capacity. In any case, the newspaper habit is more or less dying out among the lower middle classes.'

However, she believes there is an urgent need to rethink the role of the newspaper in the modern world. At present the press is merely trying to tail television, she points out. She thinks it may be more effective to provide the audience with the details and analysis that television rarely offers.

Brand Image

According to Kapoor, newspaper managements today have 'entered the cut throat business of hiking circulation through means used to boost sales of manufactured consumer goods ... The whole attitude has changed from publishing quality news to promoting "brands".[5] In some establishments, even the designations of newspaper editors/managers have been changed to suit the new corporate image of the newspaper. For example, the resident editors of *The Times of India* editions in different cities are now known as editor (Mumbai market), editor (Bangalore market), and so on.

Many journalists see no harm in the new emphasis. 'I am not ashamed to be a brand,' said Bachi Karkaria, speaking at the seminar on women in media mentioned above. 'A brand is merely something that has an identity of its own and stands above the clutter. The reader has to be seen as a consumer and as a whole person who likes entertainment as much as serious concerns.'

Karkaria deplores what she calls 'the arrogance of people in the media,' which makes them think they should be able to give anything they want to the readers. 'You have to package the news to make it palatable,' she says. 'If you want to give your paper to readers, you have to have takers. We live in the age of the soundbite. Seven hundred words is the outer limit for stories. The print media need to learn from television about packaging the news. In a mainstream paper you cannot go into too much analysis—there are specialized publications for that. The big paper feeds the food chain.'

According to her, journalists 'need to reassess the way we look at ourselves, our papers and our readers.' She does not believe that the position of the editor has been downgraded by recent trends. 'We have just moved with the times,' she says. She recalls what the editor of *The Statesman* once said: 'I bring out a newspaper—surely you don't expect me to bother about who reads it.' Says Karkaria, 'We can't afford to live in ivory towers any more. We have to be in the real world.'

The pressures are clearly even greater in glossy magazines, especially those aiming at female audiences. Amrita Shah, who briefly edited the Indian edition of *Elle*, said at the Mumbai seminar that it was important to recognize that readers like attractive images and that they are also interested in fashion, beauty, shopping and gossip. But, she pointed out, there has to be some balance. 'Unfortunately, these days editors have less and less power,' she says. 'There is constant pressure to plug products and editors are asked to blunt their judgment. Publishers seem to think anyone can edit a magazine because the format is essentially created for the advertiser.'

During a different session of the seminar, Nirja Shah, publisher/president, Ogaan Publications, which brings out *Elle* in India, described the publication as 'a look-good, feel-good magazine.' She said she did not see advertisements as clutter but as part of the information package. 'Advertising is what runs my business,' she pointed out.

She obviously has no qualms about the use of covert advertising in the magazine. According to her, this is what provides 'flow and consistency between editorial matter and overt advertising'. She claims the situation does not always demand compromise: 'Discretion has to be exercised in the kind of products or services that you editorially endorse. If a plastic bucket is very bad, I may not endorse it. I will not talk about it being good, but I will not talk about it being bad either. I will just ignore it.'

Sathya Saran, editor of *Femina*, has another view on this. Speaking at the same seminar, she said, 'We have worked closely with advertisers on a number of features but we always try to make it clear that the feature is an "advertorial" or a "Response feature" and not a straight editorial article.' ('Response' is the advertising and marketing department of *The Times of India* group, which publishes *Femina*.)

Despite the evident sea-change in the press in the 1990s, Tellis says she is still not totally cynical about the profession. 'The press and journalism today are not all bad,' she reasons. 'Within the existing constraints, some issues are being taken up and people's voices are being heard. But newspapers and magazines are not doing anywhere near as much good as they are capable of doing. If proprietors were more committed to the press as a whole, or at least to their own publications, politicians, the executive and the judiciary would be more responsive and responsible towards the people.'

End-notes

There seems to be considerable consensus among women in the profession that significant changes have taken place in the policies, practices, priorities and preoccupations of the press in recent years. There is less unanimity about the precise turning point and the factors that brought it on. Similarly, most journalists agree that the content, style and emphasis of the press in the 1990s is remarkably different from what was prevalent in the preceding decades. But they have varying views on whether the shift has been good, bad, indifferent or just plain inevitable.

What is not in dispute, however, is the fact that commercial pressures now determine the nature of the press to a greater extent than ever before. And that, thanks to this, the social role and responsibility of the Fourth Estate has been more or less left to simmer on the back burner.

These developments may seem extraneous to the gender question. However, there is a gender element to the issue in terms of the impact of the altered climate on journalists, their work and the satisfaction they derive from it.

There is general agreement within the profession about the fact that more women than men traditionally looked upon journalism as a vocation through which they could make a difference to society. It is also widely recognized that women have contributed significantly to broadening the base of journalism in India. Young journalists claim that even now the little idealism left in the press is to be found mainly in the female half of it.

It is, therefore, not surprising that a large number of women in the profession are unhappy about trends which seem to not only undermine the social role and responsibility of the press but also restrict the range and depth of its coverage. At the same time, it must be noted that some of them have made their peace with the situation and achieved success in the new, market-savvy environment.

At the 59th annual general body meeting of the Indian Newspaper Society in September 1998, the outgoing president warned that sluggishness in the country's economy was impinging on the operations of the newspaper industry. He said the industry was going through a critical phase with escalation in costs and problems of financial liquidity. According to him, advertising revenues—a major source of sustenance for the industry—have been far from buoyant in recent times because of the overall state of the economy as well as the ever expanding electronic media.

This is, no doubt, a real problem. But most women in journalism seem to agree that, while the press does belong to an industry, journalism per se cannot be seen purely as a business. Nevertheless, given current circumstances and trends, it seems likely that the writ of the market will continue to hold sway over the profession in the foreseeable future.

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Conclusion

> *After years of 'equal opportunities' policy statements, men in the British media have come to disguise their contempt for or lack of understanding of women. But they still don't know what we're talking about, why it matters, and if and why they should care... Everything has changed for women, but nothing really has. Everything has changed because women are out there getting the jobs and being war correspondents and all that sort of thing. But, in a sense, nothing has changed because you still have to be a man in a woman's body to do really well.*
>
> Indian journalist working in the UK

If there is anything to be learnt from talking to over 200 Indian women in journalism, it is that they cannot be clubbed into a single stereotypical category. The experiences and perspectives of women in different sections of the press, at different levels, in different parts of the country are, expectedly, different. Apart from gender, a variety of factors influence both their experiences and their perceptions. These include their socio-economic and cultural location as individuals, their political perspectives, the socio-cultural milieu in which they live and work, as well as the economics and culture of the press establishments to which they belong.

Nevertheless, it is clear that women in the profession are bound together by a number of common experiences—whether they like it or not, and whether they like to acknowledge it or not. Most of these arise from the fact that gender continues to play a significant role in the way women are perceived and treated by others, both within the profession and in the wider society. These shared experiences lead, willy-nilly, to some common ground.

The good news is that the self-image of most women in the profession today is remarkably positive, virtually across the board. Even those who have faced unpleasant experiences and/or function in hostile environments seem, by and large, to have resisted self-blame. The confidence and clarity with which women, almost everywhere in the country, describe and analyse their situation within the profession is striking. This certainly bodes well for the future of women in journalism.

However, it is clear that personal self-esteem does not always translate into identification with women as a community. A large number of women in the profession object, in varying degrees, to being classified by gender (as in 'women journalists'). Although they cite various logical, understandable reasons for their opposition to such categorization, the root of their discomfort seems to be a tacit acceptance of the notion that 'female' connotes inferiority.

Yet, many of them acknowledge that women, as a whole, have made, and continue to make, valuable contributions to the press. There is also an amazing amount of agreement about the special characteristics that women bring to their work in the media. But the debate about the existence of a 'women's perspective' continues here as elsewhere. In addition, there is some difference of opinion on whether or not women working as journalists must assume a special responsibility to promote gender-sensitivity in the media. Similarly, there are divergent views on whether women make a difference to the atmosphere and culture of the journalistic workplace.

On the other hand, a surprising number of women question some of the hoary traditions of the profession. For example, a significant proportion disagree with the separation of news and issues into 'hard' and 'soft' categories and, especially, the privileging of the former over the latter. Most of them acknowledge that, to get ahead under the present system, it is necessary to break into the high-prestige areas of political and business writing. But quite a few also believe it is time to demystify some of the age-old holy cows of journalism. In addition, a large number of women are concerned about recent shifts in the agendas of major sections of the media.

Persistent Problems

There is considerable convergence of opinion about the obstacles that women in the profession continue to face on account of gender even today. The few gender-linked advantages cited by some women seem insignificant in the face of the long list of gender-based disadvantages outlined by the majority.

The growing number of women in the media workforce, particularly in media centres like Mumbai and Delhi, suggests that the barriers that once restricted women's entry into the press have now been overcome. However, in many parts of the country and certain sections of the press, resistance to the recruitment of women persists to this day.

The increasing visibility of women in the so-called mainstream, national press—as both writers and editors—suggests that there are no more impediments in women's path to the top of the editorial pyramid. However, many female journalists still experience slow and limited progress, if not total stagnation, in their careers. And, significantly, the existence of a glass ceiling which keeps women from occupying the very top spots in the hierarchy (of newspapers in particular) is almost universally acknowledged.

The spectacular success of a number of women in a wide range of high profile areas of journalism, hitherto assumed to be male terrain, suggests that there is nothing to stop competent and determined women from fulfilling their professional dreams.

However, the tendency to relegate women to particular functions and beats within the press has not completely disappeared. And many women allege that they are not given a chance to demonstrate their capabilities.

It is also important to note that class, caste, creed and community play a role in determining who, even among women, gains entry into the media and has the opportunity to rise in the profession.

Meanwhile, as the twentieth century draws to a close, the controversy over women and night work continues. A number of establishments still try to evade statutory requirements by excusing women from the night shift and/or using night duty to justify not hiring women. A number of women, on their part, are ambivalent about the issue, mainly because of anxieties about safety, domestic responsibilities and social disapproval. Many of them seem to feel that they are damned if they do work at night and damned if they do not.

Obviously, women's perennial struggle to reconcile the conflicting demands of work and family will endure into the new millenium. For journalists, this universal problem is exacerbated by the long, late and irregular hours, as well as the erratic and unpredictable work schedules, that characterize the profession. Clearly, in India as elsewhere, women still shoulder primary responsibility for the home and family.

In addition, women continue to feel the oppressive pressure of constantly having to prove themselves in a profession where the male remains the norm, despite the proven track record of a number of women. Many also mention the difficulties of cultivating news sources, who are still overwhelmingly male and, especially in certain fields, not accustomed to dealing with women on a professional footing.

Interestingly, however, these difficulties pale before the problems that many women seem to encounter in their relationships with quite a few male colleagues even today. These range from condescension and belittlement at one end of the spectrum to sexual and professional harassment at the other.

Young women entering the profession today naturally reflect many of the attitudes and mores prevalent in Indian society in the 1990s and the new millennium. Having gained from the experiences and struggles of their predecessors, they may be well placed to push aside the remaining obstructions in the career paths of women in the media. On the other hand, they may have to carefully sidestep new pitfalls as both the media and society change with the times.

In the final analysis, Indian women have not only arrived but are clearly determined to stay in journalism, despite all their reported trials and tribulations. What is more, they have already made an impact in the profession, with many excelling in the conventional, high-prestige areas of journalism and many more expanding the boundaries of the field in terms of the scope, approach, breadth and depth of coverage.

In addition, a large number of women in the profession seem to be critically aware of the media, its role in society and their own role in both the media and society. They are, therefore, ideally placed to direct the course of further change in the media. It remains to be seen whether or not they will rise to this challenge.

Systemic Adjustments

At the same time, it is clear that the structures and systems of media organizations, not to mention society, have yet to be sufficiently transformed to enable women's full, free, fearless and unfettered participation in the profession. This is an issue which obviously requires institutional attention. Media establishments have a special responsibility to take up this task since the media are supposed to document and reflect, if not influence, changes in society.

Systemic and structural adjustments in work schedules are clearly called for, if only to ensure that women's current and potential contributions to the field are not frittered away through the neglect of their felt needs and real problems. Many of these are rooted not in individual, personal foibles but in societal biases and inequalities.

This is not as tall an order as it may seem, in view of technological innovations which make flexibility entirely feasible as long as organizations are willing to accommodate it. What is required is a recognition of the need for all human beings to attend to their families and/or personal relationships, as well as to pursue their extra-professional interests. At present this need may be felt or, at least, expressed by more women than men but it is fundamentally a human need. Besides, there is no doubt that the fulfilment of this need would greatly enrich the work of both men and women as journalists.

In a 1987 paper, Sima Sharma et al cite a study by N. Hutnik and A. Sachdeva, comparing female journalists and teachers. The researchers concluded that 'media organizations have not been able to create or maintain within their female employees a sense of being one with the institution.'[1]

As they point out, the pre-deadline syndrome around which media work revolves is often a symptom of editorial inefficiency and not an inevitable characteristic of a media job. Not all media jobs are essentially tied to late breaking news. Yet, the 'good employee' is seen not as the one who works regularly and consistently but as the one who stays in the office late into the night. According to the researchers, 'The image of the good employee, be it male or female, is detrimental to the very institution of marriage.'[2]

Many women today agree with the notion that the persistence of this false image is detrimental to their own well-being, both personally and professionally, in addition to that of their families.

Geneva-based Chitra Subramaniam points out that such problems have dogged women everywhere for a long time. As she puts it, '... in a society where both men and women are exploited, women are doubly exploited because the labour market has failed to see them as mothers.' According to her, 'There is enough data to show how cultures, whether they be eastern or western, explicitly subordinate women and how the labour market has picked up from where history left off and how the world—developed and developing—is packed with socio-cultural arrangements that exclude women from participating in those realms of society where the highest powers reside.'

According to Sharma et al, 'In reality, even the most progressive of media organizations, who have had women working with them for many years, have done little to adapt the organizational culture to accommodate the needs of their women employees. When physical facilities like toilets and lunch rooms are far from adequate, it would be unrealistic to talk of day-care centres, transport or restricted schedules.

'The toughest challenges in a working woman's life are the years when her children are very young. A journalist's lot is certainly difficult. Instead of making an effort to retain the female employee by making adjustments, most private media organizations are happy to part company with her as she decides to drop out of the race. It is not that the same organization would not be humane enough to reassign an employee who has a heart problem, failing eyesight or a temporary setback to his health. The question is simply not considered in the context of parenthood.

'It is indeed the subtle nuances and inbuilt norms of organizational behaviour that operate against the mid-career woman journalist more than any lack of chivalry on the part of the colleagues. They all "love" her and are more than sympathetic to her "domestic commitments" (their own commitments apparently do not lie there) and her children's problems. These all add up to a tacit agreement to keep her out of responsible positions or challenging assignments. I have often advised younger women colleagues, "Don't talk of your child being sick, just hint at pressing personal work. With luck, they will think you, too, are playing the stock market."'[3]

Woman Power

It is often assumed that having more women in the media, particularly in decision-making positions, would improve matters in at least two respects: first, in terms of employment opportunities and working conditions for fellow mediawomen and, second, in terms of media content, including (but not only) the representation in the media of women and their particular interests and concerns.

However, as Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi points out, this does not necessarily happen automatically. According to her, 'It is by no means clear that increased numbers of women employed in media industries leads directly to improved gender representation in media output. There is considerable evidence that the increasing number of women in media does not in itself translate into a radically altered news agenda of priorities. Past experience shows that the increased number of women is rarely converted into a restructuring of the media agenda.' The lethargy inside organizations, the dynamics of socialization and conformity within them, and the human desire to maintain the status quo cannot be underestimated, she points out.[4]

Nevertheless, she acknowledges that the number of women in the media does affect their opportunities to alter organizational culture, management style and actual media output. As more women gain access, she says, the sheer weight of numbers may begin to change things. However, she believes that active policies of equal opportunities are required if real change is to be effected. This would mean, among other things, bringing in gender equity at each and every level of the media organization and identifying 'glass ceilings' as well as the reasons for their continued existence.[5]

In addition, she says, 'Since it is often the "invisible barriers" of attitudes, biases and presumptions that hinder women, assertiveness training and support groups within and outside organizations can help women feel less isolated and alienated and empower them to try to act differently and produce difference.'[6]

Margaret Gallagher is fairly positive about the potential impact of women's increasing numerical strength in the media. She believes it can eventually influence the priorities and values of the media. 'The concern to improve women's participation in the communication industries springs not just from a preoccupation with equal rights in employment,' she points out. 'The overarching assumption is that the presence of more women—particularly in creative and decision-making positions—should introduce new perspectives and interpretations within media output, and should lead to greater diversification of images and messages.'[7]

Although she admits that this assumption remains to be proven, she says, 'There is some reason to believe—or at least to hope—that a "critical mass" of women will have some success in changing the long-established media practices, routines and priorities which individual female professionals have been powerless to shift.'[8]

Network Solutions

A recurring theme in recent discussions on empowering women in the media is the importance of networking. It has been pointed out, time and again, that networks of media women can play a vital role in ensuring women's greater participation in, and greater impact on, the media. As Sreberny-Mohammadi puts it, 'Women have shown themselves to be excellent networkers, living locally but both thinking and acting globally, extending solidarity across national and other boundaries.'[9]

Many participants at a 1995 international symposium on Women and the Media—Access to Expression and Decision-Making, organized by UNESCO in Toronto, proposed the creation and reinforcement of lasting networks of women. In addition, a number of recent international reports on women's employment and experiences within the media emphasize the critical importance of organizing, networking and lobbying.[10]

Indeed, several national, regional and global women's networks focussing on the media have emerged over the years. One international network, WomMed/FemMed, was actually initiated by participants at the Toronto symposium. The notion that such groupings are anachronisms in the 'post-feminist' era of the 1990s is questionable in view of the fact that quite a few of them have, in fact, sprung up in the latter part of this decade.

'Organized in networks, women can break out of isolation, draw benefits from solidarity, reinforce their gender specific points of view, communicate, exchange experiences, motivate each other and share their successes,' says the report on the Toronto symposium. 'They can thus support each other in achievement and in times of difficulty. Networks are also spaces of research, reflection and action. They can contribute to the process of training or at least the informing of women, especially where women's rights are concerned. Networks can constitute powerful pressure groups towards obtaining from governments those mechanisms that assure equal opportunities. Networks can also establish economic and commercial solidarity ... '[11]

Here in India, too, there seems to be a fresh impetus towards new collectives of women in journalism—not only in major media centres but, more significantly, in places where women's presence and position in the media are still tentative, if not precarious. Of course, a few women in the field are dismissive of such efforts but the majority, including many new entrants to the field, seem to favour them. In fact, several women in outposts where women constitute a tiny minority in the press say they would like to not only form and/or join local groups but also be linked up to a national network. Now that there is a will, a way may well emerge.

Helping Hands

Another issue frequently highlighted in recent discussions on women in the media is the importance of role models and mentors.

Mentoring in this context involves the development of nurturing relationships at work, usually between older and younger colleagues, so that the latter can learn from the experiences of the former. The process is particularly useful for those facing obstacles, who can be helped to acquire the skills, knowledge and experience required to improve their job options and reduce their feelings of isolation, alienation and exclusion.

As a formal concept, it has yet to make an impact in India. However, thanks to the close relationships that many women in the press seem to forge across lines of age and seniority, an ongoing, informal—if uneven and limited—process of mentoring is already in operation.

Of course, the environment created by the individualistic outlook of the 1990s and the competitive nature of the media today may militate against the notion of mentoring. There is a widespread feeling among older journalists that many young people now do not need or, at least, would not want 'big sisters' in the profession. However, several young women in the field indicate that they would welcome more guidance and nurture than they currently receive from seniors in the field.

There is, obviously, a mismatch between the perceptions of older and younger women in the profession. This is yet another area where networks can create opportunities for a more systematic process of mentoring, as well as for training and career development.

Strategies for Change

There is considerable consistency in the conclusions drawn and the empowerment strategies advocated by those who have recently surveyed the employment patterns, experiences and views of women in the media across the world.

For instance, the key tactics listed by Gallagher to help overcome existing obstacles in their way are: organizing and lobbying, mentoring, advocating changes in policies and attitudes (in favour of equal opportunities), setting specific goals and targets (to ensure the implementation of equal opportunities), formulating clear criteria for recruitment and selection, instituting programmes for training and career development, improving working conditions, and monitoring employment patterns (to build up a data base and check the effectiveness of equal opportunities).[12]

In two recent survey reports, the IWMF also suggests that solutions to current problems can be found through mentoring, training, organizing and networking, legislating and mainstreaming (the latter is defined as bringing men, too, into the picture). At an IWMF conference, 'Empowering Women in the Asian Media,' held in Manila in June 1998, delegates came up with strategies for women journalists, media organizations and media associations to adopt in order to promote better participation of women in media management—which, in turn, is expected to improve both the position of women in journalism as well as journalistic practice itself. (See Box, p. 357)

A number of significant international conferences have also discussed in detail the multipronged strategies required to ensure women's equal and equitable access to, and participation in, the media. Although most of these discussions go beyond the question of the status of women in journalism per se, they clearly see the empowerment of women professionals working within the media as crucial to the effort to democratize the media.

For instance, the Platform for Action emerging from UNESCO's Toronto symposium calls upon media enterprises to 'adopt positive action programmes, including equal pay for equal work, equal access to training, fair and transparent promotion procedures, targets and timetables to achieve a fair proportion of women in decision-making positions, action against sexual harassment, so that women can reach their full potential as media professionals.' It also suggests that media women be included in media self-regulatory committees and other executive committees that draft programme guidelines, budgets, contracts and personnel documents. It even mentions the need for media organizations to ‘take steps when feasible towards providing food service and childcare, in view of the unpredictability of schedules for covering breaking news’.

The Toronto Platform for Action also calls on professional media organizations to ‘establish and increase the membership of local, regional, national and international networks for women media professionals in order to address professional concerns, form mentoring programmes, promote contacts for professional training and advancement, and develop women’s sense of pride and professionalism’.

Similarly, Section J of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 calls on governments, industry and non-governmental organizations to take an active part in increasing the ‘participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication’. This was possibly the first time that ‘Women and Media’ was included as a separate area of concern in a document emerging from an official conference on women and endorsed by virtually all the nations of the world.[13] According to the IWMF, Section J is ‘one of many significant “first steps” in defining future success’ in overcoming the remaining obstacles that women all over the world face in accessing and actively participating in the media.[14]

Impetus for Change

However, altruistic reasons are clearly not the only ones currently compelling media organizations in different parts of the world to rethink policies towards women journalists as well as female readers. According to Gallagher, over the past decade, some of the world’s major media organizations have concluded that the active promotion of equal opportunities is good management practice and makes sound commercial sense.[15] And, as Maurine Beasley and Sheila Gibbons point out, in the US, with women's readership of newspapers declining at a slightly faster rate than that of men, newspaper executives are under considerable pressure to bring women back to the newspaper.[16]

According to Gibbons, American newspaper companies are addressing this problem in several ways: by 'exploring definitions of news and testing to see if those definitions tend to exclude women's activities; analysing the tone and content of stories written about women and about men to see if there are differences in the ways reporters write about women and men; and reintroducing content just for women in the form of a women's page or a weekly women's section or throughout the newspaper'.[17]

Women journalists are crucial to this process of feminising the press. While some studies suggest that women and men in the media do not necessarily differ in their approach to stories or issues, others suggest that, when they constitute a reasonable numerical force, women can and do make a difference.

For instance, a 1992 survey of managing editors of the 100 largest daily newspapers in the US found that 84 per cent of responding editors agreed that women have made a difference—both in defining the news and in expanding the range of topics considered newsworthy.[18] Gallagher also suggests that, apart from introducing 'new topics'—which are actually 'age-old concerns for women'—female journalists have occasionally been able to change the way in which established events and issues are covered. Women do inherit news agendas within the media, she says, but they can also change those agendas in a way which ultimately affects male colleagues also.[19]

According to her, 'The pursuit of equality in the media—as in all other spheres—is not a radical feminist issue. It is a matter of human rights, a part of the struggle for genuine democracy in society at large and in media institutions in particular. As long as women and men are not given the possibility to work together on an equal basis, sharing the same rights and the same responsibilities, there is a "democratic deficit" in our societies. Until media employment patterns reflect a more equitable gender balance, it will be impossible to claim that there is genuine democracy in the media or their messages.'[20]

At the end of the day, it is clear that the question of women's presence and participation in the media goes beyond the notions of affirmative action, equal opportunities for employment and professional advancement irrespective of gender, and so on—vital as these are. In view of the crucial place occupied by the media in modern society, access to, and participation in, the media are essential for full and equal citizenship.

Not all women—nor all members of other disadvantaged or marginalized groups—would wish to be able to participate in the media as professional journalists. However, if the media are to live up to their position as the Fourth Estate and their reputation as watchdogs, the composition of their staff must surely reflect the plurality of the society they are supposed to watch over, document and interpret in the public interest.

Unlike the products of other large industries, media products are constantly shaped and re-shaped by the human beings who produce them. Their knowledge and ideas, their powers of observation and analysis, their beliefs and assumptions, their opinions and prejudices determine the nature and content of the media and its messages. It is only natural that these, in turn, are influenced by their socio-economic, cultural and political backgrounds. It is, therefore, imperative that those who work in the media represent the diversity of the society they serve.

If women hold up half the sky, they must also have a say in at least half of what the media tell the world.

Advancing women into management positions[21]

What can journalists, media organizations and journalists' associations do to promote increased numbers of women in management positions? The IWMF asked this question of participants at the 'Empowering Women in the Asian Media' conference in Manila in June 1998. The delegates came up with the following strategies:

Women journalists should:

- support other women journalists; network with colleagues.
- promote professionalism in the office.
- dare to lead differently.
- promote gender sensitization.
- get the support of male peers and family members.

Media companies should:

- establish policies conducive to work and family issues.
- use technology for added work flexibility.
- conduct leadership training programmes.
- create and maintain balance in assignments.
- promote on merit.

Media associations should:

- be involved in media campaigns and advocacy.
- provide research and documentation on women in leadership; be a clearinghouse of information.
- provide leadership and skills training for both men and women.
- create and promote opportunities for networking.
- advocate on behalf of women in leadership.

Notes

Introduction

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8. 2001 figure: *Manorama Yearbook*, 2002, Malayala Manorama, Kottayam; also *Press in India 2002*, RNI website (see *above*), accessed on 10 November 2004.
9. Figures cited in a review of a 2002 study conducted by the Asian Media, Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) India, Chennai, posted on www.inomy.com, accessed in October 2002.

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Building a Network

The Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI) emerged through a long, slow, participatory, bottom-up process of network-building which began in the first year of the new millennium. The networking process, which built upon earlier efforts in different parts of the country to get media women together, was more or less sparked off by the publication of this book in 2000. The idea of a professional association linking women journalists across the country emerged in the course of interviews for the book, when a number of women expressed the need for such a body.

REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

The process began with three regional workshops organized specifically to find out whether or not women journalists in India wanted such a network and, if so, for what purpose and towards what end. The workshops were held during 2000-2001 in three different locations across the country. The first one, in Bangalore in November 2000, brought together approximately fifty journalists from five states in the south and west, working in six languages. Another fifty participants, representing eight states and seven languages, gathered in Jaipur for the second one, in April 2001, which ambitiously attempted to cover the north, east and north-east. Since not many women from the north-east and east were able to journey all the way to Rajasthan, a third workshop was organized in Shillong in September 2001, bringing together twenty-five media women from five of the seven north-eastern states, as well as Bengal and Orissa.

The workshops were designed to be informal, interactive get-togethers of a cross-section of women working at different levels in the media in various Indian languages. There were no formal papers or speeches: just a few questions to guide discussions. Thanks, perhaps, to the democratic nature and open structure of the workshops, participants appeared to assume ownership of the process from the very beginning. All of them enthusiastically endorsed the notion of a network at the national level. Even more significantly, many of them went back and initiated local networks in their respective places. It was on the basis of the positive response from women journalists in different parts of the country that the concept of a nationwide network of women working in the media took shape.

FIRST NATIONAL WORKSHOP

The first all-India workshop, organized in New Delhi in January 2002, brought over 100 media women from sixteen states and the national capital* together on a common platform to discuss various issues relating to the media, as well as to decide on the character and form of the proposed network. Again, every effort was made to plan the workshop collectively, with inputs and feedback on the agenda solicited from all those who had participated in the regional rounds.

There was broad consensus among those who attended the first national meeting on the need for multi-layered, informal networks of women journalists that could serve multiple purposes, both professional and societal. Apart from the obvious function as a forum for addressing issues related to the media as a workplace, it was felt that such networks could facilitate career advancement through the sharing of information and resources, mentoring and, eventually, training and professional enrichment programmes. In addition, participants suggested that platforms of this kind could help highlight important issues relating to media standards and ethics, as well as the vital role of the media in society, especially in a democratic and pluralistic country like India. The NWMI was collectively conceptualized, unanimously endorsed and formally launched on the last day of the workshop, 30 January 2002.

The workshop report, which is available on the NWMI website (www.nwmindia.org), makes it clear that the network has, from its inception, addressed a variety of interests and needs, and reflected a wide range of concerns about the media, both as a profession and as an integral, crucial actor in a democracy generally and a developing country particularly.

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* New Delhi and environs, plus the following states: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Goa, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu.

For example, the inaugural session featured two keynote addresses: one on The Media and the Right to Information by the well-known grassroots activist, Aruna Roy, and the other on The Media and Education by the eminent educationist, Krishna Kumar. A panel on critical issues confronting the media featured presentations analysing the links between media and gender in the context of globalization, militarization and communalization (by political activist Subhashini Ali and academics Anuradha Chenoy and Tanika Sarcar respectively).

Another panel brought together Indian and expatriate women journalists with experience in covering violent conflicts for national and international media to spark off a discussion on whether or not gender makes a difference in such situations. An evening screening of a documentary film on the widows of political massacres in Bihar (*Hashiye Par Zindagi/ Life on the Margin)* helped focus attention on one of the many gender dimensions of violent conflict that are often neglected by the media.

Group discussions at the workshop also reflected the wide range of concerns identified during the regional workshops. On the first day they focussed on work-related issues of particular concern to women that had been identified during the regional workshops (such as employment opportunities, working conditions, work assignments, freelancing, and harassment in the workplace). On the second day they moved on to larger issues concerning the media, which had also been flagged during the earlier workshops (such as the impact of economic liberalization and globalization on the media, the special challenges facing small and medium size press establishments and sections of the language press, emerging priorities and preoccupations in media coverage, journalistic ethics and standards, and the portrayal of women and coverage of gender issues in the media).

In addition, the hastily drafted statement issued at the end of the workshop, which has become an impromptu, preliminary charter for the network (and is also available on the NWMI website), establishes the fact that network members are concerned about a wide range of issues relating to the media, women and society at large.

SUBSEQUENT WORKSHOPS

The second national workshop, held in Mumbai in January 2004 with no external funding, kept up the tradition of addressing a range of issues, some relating to the workplace and others to the broader question of the media within society (the detailed report is available on the NWMI site).

For instance, an entire morning session was devoted to a discussion on the theme, 'Another Journalism is Possible', echoing the slogan of the World Social Forum which took place in the city a few days later ('Another World is Possible'). The dialogue covered the ongoing crisis in journalism, as well as related concerns about the current focus, standards and ethics of the media. In addition, Carolyn M Byerly, a visiting American media scholar, presented her feminist analysis of media conglomeration, a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly relevant in the Indian context.

At the same time, participants also discussed workplace-related issues such as sexual harassment, the gross violation of media workers' rights by a major newspaper house, and the intimidation of journalists by communal forces in certain parts of the country.

The third national workshop, held in Hyderabad in January 2005, turned out to be something of a landmark. Among the several factors that made the three-day event exceptional were: the interactions between women working in 'mainstream' and community media; the participation of media women from across Andhra Pradesh (not just the state capital); and the extraordinary cooperation and hospitality extended by diverse media organizations and others in Hyderabad. Detailed reports on various aspects of the meeting are available on the NWMI website.

Among the participants who attended the working sessions of the first two days were three unique women journalists working with Navodayam, a rural women's magazine. The third day was devoted to a field visit to Medak district to meet the well-known women broadcasters (radio and video) of the DDS Community Media Trust, based in Pastapur. The rare opportunity to interact with these rural colleagues was, in many ways, the highlight of the meeting for most of the urban participants.

Topics discussed at the workshop included the situation of women in the 'language' media (with special focus on the local Telugu and Urdu press) and the electronic media, sexual harassment in media workplaces, the relative absence of rural and/or Dalit women in the 'mainstream' media, the experiences of women in community media, as well as media monitoring, media activism and networking. One of the tangible outcomes of the meeting was the setting up of a national e-group to facilitate communication across the country.

LOCAL NETWORKS

The local groups that emerged in the wake of the regional and national workshops in at least a dozen centres across the country have been more active in some places than in others. However, several of them have established a pattern of periodic, if not regular, meetings and occasional special events. A number of them have also set up e-groups to streamline communication and facilitate the sharing of ideas and resources.

The Network of Women in Media, Mumbai (NWMM), for instance, has over the past few years initiated discussions on media coverage of war (sparked off by the post-9/11 attacks on Afghanistan in 2001), natural and man-made disasters (such as the 2001 earthquake and the 2002 communal carnage in Gujarat, with inputs from journalists who had covered the events), and religious minorities. In addition it has hosted speakers on subjects ranging from the grassroots movement to claim people's right to information and the saffronization of history to childhood sexual abuse, gender aspects of the Muslim Personal Law, and the imposition of dress codes on women by various conservative forces. It also invited Syed Iftikhar Gilani, Delhi bureau chief of *Kashmir Times,* to speak on his experience of being arrested and imprisoned after being falsely charged with possession of classified documents; human rights advocate Mihir Shah also spoke at the event about the Official Secrets Act, the potential misuse of its provisions, and the implications of this for the media.

The Network of Women in Media, Bangalore (NWMB), has organized a number of formal and informal events. Among its major enterprises were a seminar on the media and communal conflict—with special reference to the carnage in Gujarat; a workshop on sex selection—with a special focus on the role of the media; the Bangalore premiere of Anand Patwardhan's film, *War & Peace,* while its battle with the Censor Board was still raging (all organised in collaboration with other city-based institutions and groups); and a musical evening celebrating 'Women Composers of India through the Ages' presented by the Gaa Madhuri group featuring Shakuntala Narasimhan (journalist, author, musician and NWMB member) and her students. Among the many interesting informal gatherings organized by the group over the years were interactions with the eminent historian, Romila Thapar, well-known names from the literary world such as Shashi Deshpande, Mridula Garg and Meenakshi Mukherjee, and other visitors to the city working on a variety of issues that could inform journalistic practice.

The All Bihar Women Journalists' Forum, set up soon after the regional workshop in Jaipur, convened a major conference in August 2001 that brought women journalists from different parts of Bihar as well as Jharkhand together for the first time. Subsequently it has held a number of seminars on issues ranging from international politics and human rights to the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) and the police, communal strife and the media. Similarly, the Bengal network organized a talk on AIDS and Prejudice by a visiting activist from the UK and the Pune group organized an exhibition of photographs on women and work by the well-known (male) journalist, P Sainath.

In addition to periodic, informal discussions on various aspects of media coverage, the NWMM and the NWMB conducted surveys of the coverage of the Gujarat violence by the press in their respective cities during February-March 2002. The reports that emerged from the monitoring exercise were presented at the NWMB seminar on covering communal conflict and subsequently posted on the media-watch website, The Hoot. The reports are also available on the NWMI and India Together websites.

A number of groups have organised film screenings for the benefit of members (and, sometimes, other invitees). For example, besides *War & Peace*, the NWMB hosted Nupur Basu's *Michael Jackson Comes to Manekganj*, as well as a double bill with Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Kandahar* and *Return to Kandahar,* a documentary directed by Nelofer Pazira, the Afghan-Canadian journalist who stars in the Iranian feature film, along with Paul Jay. Among the several films screened by the NWMM were *Calling the Ghosts*, a film by Mandy Jacobson on the war in Bosnia (focussing particularly on the infamous rapes of Bosnian women and the role of the media in covering them), Paromita Vohra's *Unlimited Girls* and Pankaj Rishi Kumar's *Mat* (The Vote).

An equally important and enjoyable feature of local activities are the regular meetings, which provide valuable opportunities for chatting, getting to know each other, and sharing information and experiences – in other words, networking and, often, informal mentoring. Most groups also have occasional, contributory social events where the only agenda is enjoyment in the company of colleagues turned friends.

It has been understood from the beginning that local networks would be autonomous and free to evolve their own identities, structures and modes of functioning, as well as their own priorities and programmes. Many local groups have also opted for their own names—underlining their independence. At the same time, through their informal association with the national network, members have the benefit of being loosely connected to a larger community of colleagues across the country, gaining strength from each other, and learning from each other's experiences.

Discussions during the regional and national workshops had led to the conclusion that, in keeping with the nature and limitations of a network, the NWMI would not attempt to be or function as a union. It was agreed that the network would, instead, highlight issues, bring them to the notice of existing organizations (including unions and other media organizations), and strive to act as a pressure group. Although its informal nature and loose structure have, at times, been stumbling blocks in terms of achieving consensus and making quick decisions, the network has managed to live up to this resolve in a number of instances.

For example, the NWMI has voiced its protest on a number of media-related matters, such as the attacks on mediapersons in Gujarat (2002), Kerala (2004), as well as Goa and Mumbai (2005), and the insensitive handling of the controversy over Gudiya, a young woman trapped between two men and a community panchayat (2004). In addition, responding to a number of cases of sexual harassment in media workplaces in different parts of the country that had been brought to its attention, the network issued a statement in 2003, urging media houses everywhere to heed the landmark judgement of the Supreme Court of India on sexual harassment at the workplace (in what is popularly known as the Vishaka case). Details of these and other interventions are available on the NWMI website.

WEBSITE

The NWMI website–launched in February 2003—is slowly but surely evolving into an interesting, useful and effective forum that seeks to promote both professional and personal enrichment. It has received enthusiastic response from women journalists and media-watchers, including many from outside the country. Several other media and women's websites have provided links to the NWMI site, and postings on the site have been further disseminated through media/gender newsletters, e-groups, blogs, etc.

Site statistics tracking traffic to the website indicate a steady growth in the number of visitors. For example, the number of 'sessions' during the first year rose from 332 in February to 5,680 in December, with the annual total standing at 33,791 and the monthly average at 3071.91. (N.B. Usage by sessions reports individual sessions for any day, week, month or range within recorded website history; sessions are tracked per IP address and must register at least one hit to be counted.) Similarly, the number of 'hits' went up from 34,428 in February to 65,400 in December, with the annual total reaching 5,16,218 and the monthly average 46,928.91. (Usage by hits reports the number of requests for any day, week, month or range within recorded website history. A hit is considered to be any request for data such as a Web page, bitmap, CGI gateway or file.)

In January 2004 the numbers stood at 6,543 sessions and 89,284 hits. By November 2004, the number of sessions had nearly doubled to reach 11,454 and the number of hits had gone well past the one lakh mark to 1,18,655. The total number of people who visited the site in February 2005 was 15,895. The data reveal a three-fold increase in the monthly average traffic on the site in the two years it has been in existence.

More importantly, members of the NWMI and others, including media practitioners, students and researchers in India and overseas, have benefited from the website in many ways. Feedback received at meetings, as well as through e-mails and postings on the site, reveal that it is becoming an increasingly useful source of information concerning media and gender related news and analysis, as well as professional opportunities ranging from jobs to training. Women journalists (and, presumably, others) based outside the main metropolises, who had little access to such resources in the past, are now able to make use of announcements on the site about scholarships and fellowships, competitions and awards, workshops and conferences, and a number of other opportunities. The site has also enabled the dissemination of news concerning women journalists, including awards received, honours bestowed, books launched, and so on, adding to the sense of belonging and community.

The potential of the website to reach out and make a difference is currently limited by financial constraints. The initial grant covered only the first year's operating expenses. Since editorial content is entirely dependent on voluntary contributions, it is difficult to generate a steady supply of fresh, original material. Although the site was set up on the understanding that additional funding for two years would be made available, the promised follow-up grants have not materialized. Nevertheless a few believers are continuing to keep the site going as a labour of love, despite the blood, sweat and tears.

WORK IN PROGRESS

In the final analysis, the network is still very much a work in progress. It is a fledgling, struggling association, experiencing many downs for every up. Since it is a collective endeavour, its evolution and potential impact depends on the participation and contribution of everyone involved. Different people naturally have different visions of and expectations from such a network. There is general agreement that it should strive to fulfil a wide variety of concerns, needs and interests, both personal and professional. In an informal and non-hierarchical venture, every member has an equal chance to shape the network and ensure that it evolves into an organization that serves the interests of its members, at one level, and promotes ethics, responsibility and social consciousness within the media, at another level.

Perhaps the most positive aspect of the network at this point in its evolution is the fact that it came into being to meet a felt need among women in the media. And that there does seem to be a growing, spreading, comforting and empowering sense of belonging to a larger community of media women who care about each other, about professionalism and ethics in the media, and about gender and other important issues relating to human rights, democracy and development.

There are, of course, many cynics who belittle or dismiss the network itself, and even the concept of such an association, as too irrelevant and inconsequential to be worth bothering about. But there is no doubt that a number of women journalists across the country, especially (though not only) among those based outside the main metropolises and media centres, have already benefited greatly from being in touch with a larger community of journalists, from the mentoring that this has made possible, and from all the information and resources that have, for the first time, been made freely and widely available to everyone through the network. As a senior journalist remarked at the monthly meeting of the Bangalore network some time ago, even among those who don't participate much in group activities, there seems to be some degree of comfort in the knowledge that such a network exists.

Time is, of course, a major constraint among media professionals, especially women, who also have to deal with double and triple burdens of work and responsibilities. Also, in the present media environment in India, where journalists are hired on individual contracts, job security is almost non-existent. In a situation where anything that remotely resembles a union is totally frowned upon, there is naturally some reluctance to be identified with any group that may be construed to be activist or militant or even feminist, whether or not it is any of the above.

It is always a challenge to keep informal collectives going without the customary hierarchical structures, formal designations, external funding, and so on. But the decision to give voluntary, collective functioning a chance was made after considerable debate during the first national workshop. The issue was again discussed during the second national workshop, especially in view of the bottlenecks and stumbling blocks that had occasionally hampered the functioning of the network in the intervening two years. But, in the final analysis, the general feeling was that collective ownership and responsibility was a goal that was still worth pursuing, difficult as it may be to put into practice.

One advantage of more formal, structured, even hierarchical organizations is, of course, that they can be more efficient and productive (though this is obviously not a guaranteed outcome). At the same time, a major disadvantage of such traditional organizations is that they are often identified with a single leader or a small group of leaders and that this makes them vulnerable to power struggles, vested interests, and so on.

Networks are, almost by definition, meant to be relatively egalitarian, with each member constituting a vital link in the chain. The NWMI would like to demonstrate that it is entirely possible for women in the media of all ages, shapes and sizes—not to mention classes, castes, creeds, languages and ethnic origins, as well as seniority, success rates, fame, etc.—to be equal partners in an effort to promote the participation and influence of women in the media, to advance gender equality and justice in society through the media, and to preserve the media's role as a vital pillar of democracy.

And that is the story so far ... Watch this space or, rather, www.nwmindia.org.*

Ammu Joseph

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* Detailed reports on the network-building process, the workshops and some of the documents mentioned above can be found in the About Us section of the NWMI website, as well as in the special edition of the Voices for Change journal on Women in Journalism (Vol.6, No.1, May 2002)—see www.voicesforall.org.

Journalists Who Have Contributed to this Book

Amrita Abraham, senior editor, *The Indian Express*, Mumbai.
Anu Agarwal, freelance writer/art critic, Jaipur.
R. Akhileshwari, special correspondent, *Deccan Herald*, Hyderabad.
Shahnaz Anklesaria Aiyar, freelance journalist/columnist, Delhi.
Padma Alva, regional manager (north), Press Trust of India, Delhi.
Anita Anand, director, Women's Features Service, Delhi.
Annu Anand, freelance journalist, Delhi.
Sujata Anandan, special correspondent, *The Indian Express*, Mumbai.
Carol Andrade, editor, Response Features, *The Times of India*, Mumbai.
Gita Aravamudan, freelance journalist/columnist, Bangalore.
Shalini Arun, assistant editor, *The Hindu*, Chennai.
Gouri Agtey Athale, special correspondent, *The Financial Express*, Pune.
Shona Bagai, reporter, *The Telegraph*, Calcutta.
Vidya Bal, freelance writer and editor, *Miloon Sarya Jani*, Pune.
Malavika Ramachandran Banerjee, news editor, *The Asian Age*, Calcutta.
Kusum Bapna, staff journalist, *Rajasthan Patrika*, Jaipur.
Nupur Basu, correspondent, New Delhi Television, Bangalore.
Shrabani Basu, special correspondent, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, London.
Sudeshna Basu, senior sub-editor, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta.
Benazir, sub-editor, *Balarama, Malayala Manorama*, Kottayam.
Rasheeda Bhagat, deputy editor, *Business Line*, Chennai.
Devyani Bhardwaj, freelance journalist, Jaipur.
Simran Bhargava, editor, *Cosmopolitan*, Delhi.
Bindu Bhaskar, chief sub-editor, *Frontline*, Chennai.
Tulasi Bhaskaran, chief sub-editor, *Deshabhimani*, Thiruvananthapuram.
Sheela Bhatt, editor (news and current affairs), Star TV, Delhi.
Swati Bhattacharjee, senior sub-editor (features), *The Telegraph*, Calcutta.
Chandrimia Bhattacharya, sub-editor (features), *The Telegraph*, Calcutta.
Bileena, reporter, *Mathrubhumi*, Kochi.
Dionne Bunsha, staff reporter, *The Times of India*, Mumbai.
Rosamma Chacko, sub-editor, *Malayala Manorama*, Kottayam.

Ajanta Chakraborty, staff reporter, *The Statesman*, Calcutta.
Sashwati Chakravarti, deputy editor, *The Economic Times*, Bangalore.
Gouri Chatterjee, deputy editor (features), *The Telegraph*, Calcutta.
Maitreyi Chatterjee, freelance journalist/music critic, Calcutta.
Manini Chatterjee, head, Indian News Network (INN), Delhi.
Shubhada Chaukar, sub-editor, *Loksatta*, Mumbai.
Rupa Chinai special correspondent–health, *The Times of India* Mumbai.
Alpana Chowdhury, freelance journalist, Mumbai.
Debosruti Roy Chowdhury, senior sub-editor, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta.
Neerja Chowdhury, political editor, *The Indian Express*, Delhi.
Sucheta Dalal, financial editor, *The Times of India*, Mumbai.
Manjiri Damle, correspondent, *Pune Times*, Pune.
Sabarni Das, senior sub-editor, *Sananda*, Calcutta.
Sanchita Das, principal correspondent, *Business India*, Chennai.
Rajashri Dasgupta, themes editor, *The Telegraph*, Calcutta.
Julian D'Costa, reporter/sub-editor, *The Herald, Panaji.*
Pamela D'Mello, correspondent, *The Asian Age*, Panaji.
Aditi De, chief sub-editor, Sunday Herald, *Deccan Herald*, Bangalore.
Shobhaa Dé, columnist/author/former editor, Mumbai.
Jayshree Desai, special correspondent, *Chitralekha* (Marathi), Mumbai.
Seema Deshpande, reporter, *Loksatta*, Pune.
Tina Doshi, freelance feature writer, Mumbai.
Sherna Gandhy, editor, *Pune Times*, Pune.
Tanushree Gangopadhyay, correspondent, *Deccan Herald*, Ahmedabad.
Gayatri, reporter, *The Indian Express*, Hyderbad.
Nalini Gera, former editor/publisher, *The Maharashtra Herald*, Pune.
Pushpa Girimaji, syndicated columnist, Delhi.
Vineetha Gopi, reporter, *Malayala Manorama*, Thiruvananthapuram.
Pushpa Goswami, radio & television journalist, Jaipur.
Neelam Gupta, sub-editor, *Jansatta*, Delhi.
Ruchira Gupta, television and print journalist, Delhi.
Smita Gupta, special correspondent, *The Times of India*, Delhi.
Hemabindu, sub-editor, *Vaartha*, Hyderabad.
Hemalatha, sub-editor, *Malayala Manorama*, Kottayam.
Razia Sultan Ismail, chief (information, communication andexternal relations), UNICEF, Delhi.
Pushpa Iyengar, special correspondent, *The Times of India*, Hyderabad.
Saroj Iyer, chief sub-editor, *The Times of India*, Mumbai.
Madhu Jain, senior editor, *India Today*, Delhi.
Mamta Jaitly, editor/publisher, *Ujala Chadi*, Jaipur.

A.T. Jayanthi, resident editor, *Deccan Chronicle*, Hyderabad.
K. Jayanthi, assistant editor, *Frontline*, Chennai.
Ira Jha, chief sub-editor, *Navbharat Times*, Delhi.
Ayesha Kagal, senior editor, New Delhi Television, Delhi.
Promilla Kalhan, columnist/author, Delhi.
Priyanka Kakodkar, staff reporter, *The Times of India*, Mumbai.
Aditi Kapoor, correspondent, *The Times of India*, Delhi.
Coomi Kapoor, resident editor, *The Indian Express*, Delhi.
Bachi J Karkaria, senior editor, *The Times of India*, Mumbai.
Anita Rao Kashi senior city correspondent, *The Times of India* Bangalore.
Balvinder Kaur, freelance journalist, Jaipur.
Sameera Khan, junior assistant editor, *The Times of India*, Mumbai.
Savita Kirloskar, photojournalist, Reuters, Mumbai.
Madhu Kishwar, editor, *Manushi*, Delhi.
Smruti Koppikar, principal correspondent, *India Today*, Mumbai.
Asha Krishnakumar, special correspondent, *Frontline*, Chennai.
Ranee Kumar, senior sub-editor, *The Indian Express*, Hyderabad.
Kusuma Kumari formerly sub-editor, *Kala Kaumudi*, Thiruvananthapuram.
Nirmala Lakshman, joint editor, *The Hindu*, Chennai.
K.S. Lata, resident editor, *The Economic Times*, Chennai.
Manimala, editor, *Vanita* (Hindi), *Malayala Manorama*, Delhi (now freelance).
Manimala, trainee journalist, *Rajasthan Patrika*, Jaipur.
Swati Mahalank, sub-editor, *Sakal*, Pune.
S. Urmila Majumdar, senior sub-editor, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta.
Rita Manchanda, special correspondent, Plus Channel, Delhi.
E. Mani, chief reporter, *Prajadarbar*, Hyderabad.
C.G. Manjula, senior sub-editor, *Prajavani*, Bangalore.
Kamla Mankekar, freelance journalist, Delhi.
Prema Manmadhan, senior sub-editor, *The Indian Express*, Kochi.
Usha Ram Manohar, sub-editor, Press Trust of India, Kochi.
Anjali Mathur, resident editor, *The Sunday Observer*, Mumbai.
Asha Mathur, correspondent/section editor, *Samachar Jagat*, Jaipur.
C.K. Meena, freelance journalist/faculty member (Asian College of Journalism), Bangalore.
Saloni Meghani, staff reporter, *The Times of India*, Mumbai.
Preeti Mehra, features editor, *Business Line*, Delhi.
Rita Mehta, editor, *Cine Blitz*, Mumbai.
Leela Menon, special correspondent, *The Indian Express*, Kochi.
Meena Menon, freelance journalist, Mumbai.

Parvathi Menon, chief of bureau, *Frontline*, Bangalore.
Shabnam Minwala, junior assistant editor, *The Times of India*, Mumbai.
Anjali Mody, special correspondent, *The Indian Express*, London.
Huma Moinuddin, sub-editor, *The Indian Express*, Hyderabad.
Sajeda Momin, assistant editor, *The Statesman*, Calcutta.
Arundhati Mukherjee, special correspondent, *Aaj Kaal*, Calcutta.
Shikha Mukherjee, chief of bureau, *The Times of India*, Calcutta.
Neelam Kumari Munjal, correspondent, *Samachar Jagat*, Jaipur.
Seema Mustafa, political editor, *The Asian Age*, Delhi.
Rajni Nagpal, senior sub-editor, *Jansatta*, Delhi.
Jagroop Narula, sub-editor, *Rajasthan Patrika*, Jaipur.
Navata, freelance journalist, Vishakapatnam.
Sevanti Ninan, columnist/author, Delhi.
Manjula Padmanabhan, cartoonist/artist/playwright, Delhi.
Padmashri, sub-editor/reporter, *Vasundhara, Eenadu*, Hyderabad.
Padmashri, sub-editor, *Eenadu*, Hyderabad.
Mrinal Pande, former editor (*Vama*and *Dainik Hindustan*) and senior editorial advisor/news anchor, New Delhi Television, Delhi.
Angana Parekh, special correspondent, *The Indian Express*, Delhi.
Parimala, sub-editor, *Business Line*, Chennai.
Malini Parthasarathy, executive editor, *The Hindu*, Chennai.
Parvathy Devi R, sub-editor/reporter, *Desbabbimani*, Thiruvananthapuram.
Asha Patel, freelance journalist, Jaipur.
Sandhya Nare Pawar, assistant editor, *Chitralekha* (Marathi), Mumbai.
Leena Pednekar, freelance journalist/columnist, Corlim.
Pamela Philipose, senior editor, *The Indian Express*, Delhi.
Mitra Phukan, freelance journalist/columnist, Guwahati.
Bharati S. Pradhan, consulting editor, *Savvy*, Mumbai.
Anita Pratap, chief of bureau (South Asia), Cable News Network (CNN), Delhi.
Preetha T.S., sub-editor, *Vanitha, Malayala Manorama*, Kottayam.
Preethy A.M., reporter/columnist, *Mathrubhumi*, Kochi.
V. Premavathy, chief sub-editor, *Business Line*, Chennai.
Jyoti Punwani, freelance journalist, Mumbai.
Anjali Puri, taking a break from journalism in London.
Renuka Puri, staff photographer, *The Indian Express*, Delhi.
Pushpa N, sub-editor, *Vanitha, Malayala Manorama*, Kottayam.
Sharita Rai, special correspondent, *The Indian Express*, Bangalore.
Usha Rai, features editor, *The Hindustan Times*, Delhi.
Indrani Raimedhi, senior sub-editor, *The Assam Tribune*, Guwahati.

Lata Raje, assistant editor, *Loksatta*, Mumbai.
Hema Ramakrishnan, special correspondent, *Business Line*, Delhi.
Roopa Rao, chief sub-editor/principal correspondent (sports), The Indian Express, Bangalore.
Sujatha Rao, sub-editor/reporter, *Vaartha*, Hyderabad.
Ratnamala, freelance journalist, Hyderabad.
Renu Ramanathan, reporter, *The Hindu*, Kochi.
Radhika Ramaseshan, special correspondent, *The Pioneer*, Delhi.
Sushila Ravindranath, chief of bureau (south), *Business India*, Chennai.
Ishani Datta Ray, sub-editor, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta.
Rajkumari Rohila, staff journalist, *Samachar Jagat Sandhya Kaleen*, Jaipur.
Tapti Roy, former resident editor, *The Asian Age*, Calcutta.
Gouri Salvi, freelance journalist, Mumbai.
Kausalya Santanam, senior sub-editor, *The Hindu*, Chennai.
Sathya Saran, editor, *Femina*, Mumbai.
Ritu Sarin, chief of bureau (investigations), *The Indian Express*, Delhi.
Sarvesh, freelance photojournalist, Delhi.
Rashmi Saxena, special correspondent, *The Week*, Delhi.
Devika Sequeira, chief correspondent-Goa, *Deccan Herald*, Panaji.
Malini Sen, sub-editor (features), *The Telegraph*, Calcutta.
Elora Sen, sports journalist, *The Statesman*, Calcutta.
Ranjana Sengupta, freelance journalist, London.
Teesta Setalvad, co-founder/editor, *Communalism Combat*, Mumbai.
Amrita Shah, freelance journalist, Mumbai.
Anuradha Shah, reporter, *The Indian Express*, Pune.
Mitaben Shah, founder-editor, *Sakhi*, Ahmedabad.
Charu Shahane, senior broadcast journalist, BBC World Service Radio, London.
Kalyani Shankar, political editor, *The Hindustan Times*, Delhi.
Kalpana Sharma, assistant editor, *The Hindu*, Mumbai.
Kshama Sharma, chief sub-editor, *Nandan*, Delhi.
Parul Sharma, senior sub-editor, Jansatta, Delhi.
Pratibha Sharma, reporter, *Samachar Jagat Sandhya Kaleen*, Jaipur.
Renu Sharma, staff journalist, regional Hindi daily, Jaipur.
Suparna Sharma, correspondent, *The Indian Express*, Guwahati.
Rithambara Shastri, news editor, United News of India, Delhi.
Meenakshi Shedde, assistant editor, *The Times of India*, Mumbai.
Meera Shenoy, special correspondent, *Business India*, Hyderabad.
Jyoti Shukla, senior feature writer, *Navbharat Times*, Mumbai.
Shiraz Sidhwa, chief of bureau (South Asia), *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Delhi.

Shubha Singh, senior editor, *The Pioneer*, Delhi.
Tavleen Singh, columnist/television journalist, Delhi/Mumbai.
Smita Sitaram, senior sub-editor, *The Indian Express*, Hyderabad.
Bhavna Somaiya, editor, *G*, Mumbai.
S Subha, freelance journalist, Chennai.
Vidya Subrahmaniam, assistant editor, *The Times of India*, Delhi.
Chitra Subramaniam special correspondent, *The Indian Express*, Geneva.
Gloria Suhasini, editorial associate, Business Publications Division, *The Indian Express* (Bombay) Group, Chennai.
Annam Suresh, freelance journalist, Calcutta.
Stephanie Sweeney, sub-editor (sports), *The Telegraph*, Calcutta.
Sandhya Taksale, chief sub-editor, *Saptahik Sakal*, Pune.
Olga Tellis, resident editor, *The Observer of Business & Politics*, Mumbai.
Bela Thaker, sub-editor, *Gujarat Samachar*, Ahmedabad.
Rema Thambi, senior sub-editor, *Deshabhimani*, Kochi.
Kareena B. Thangamam, sub-editor, *Mangalam*, Thiruvananthapuram.
Simi Thomas, trainee reporter, *Deepika*, Thiruvananthapuram.
Sudha G Tilak, special correspondent, *The Telegraph*, Chennai.
Deepal Trivedi, chief reporter, *The Indian Express*, Ahmedabad.
Sharda Ugra, senior sports reporter, *The Hindu*, Mumbai.
Neelam Upadhye, roving correspondent, *Maharashtra Times*, Mumbai.
Mala Vaishnav, features editor, *Verve*, Mumbai.
Dina Vakil, resident editor, *The Times of India*, Mumbai.
C Vanaja, staff correspondent, *The Andhra Pradesh Times*, Hyderabad.
Varalakshmi, trainee journalist, *Vaartha*, Hyderabad.
Vasanthalakshmi, former assistant editor, *Udayam*, Hyderabad.
Vaasanthi, editor, *India Today* (Tamil), Chennai.
Vasavi, Vasavi News Agency, Ranchi.
Shree Venkatram, editor, Unnati Features, Delhi.
Prema Vishwanathan, senior editor, *Asian Chemical News*, Singapore.
Soma Wadhwa, special correspondent, *Outlook*, Delhi.

And all the women across the country who have participated in and contributed to the process of building up a network of media women in India.

* * *

Some of these journalists have moved to different publications and/or posts since the period during which I contacted them (between April 1997 and August 1998). The status quo at the time of contact has been maintained for practical reasons.

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Recipients of the Chameli Devi Jain Award

The Chameli Devi Jain Award honours one or more outstanding women mediapersons every year. The annual award, given by The Media Foundation, New Delhi, was instituted in 1981 by the family of the late Chameli Devi Jain. Chameli Devi (1910–1980), wife of Phool Chand Jain of Delhi, was among those who responded to Mahatma (MK) Gandhi's call and participated actively in the freedom struggle, also dedicating herself to social reform and the emancipation of Indian women.

AWARDEES

Neerja Chowdhury—for 1981 (March 1982)

Neerja Chowdhury 'has been selected for her sustained probing of distress, whether among classes of people or areas of the country, and her ability to throw light upon the processes and causes of social injustice and the nascent efforts of some to counteract them against heavy odds. (She) has published a number of substantial investigations of the problems of the people, especially of the poorest among them ... (She) has unmasked oppression and exploitation in many lesser known parts of the country among people who do not often receive the sustained attention of investigative journalists. She has also tried to bring to public notice the dedicated efforts which a handful of organizations and individuals are making to bring some relief to the deprived and dispossessed. She has tried to carry to them the sense that neither those who suffer nor those who strive do so alone.'

Prabha Dutt and Sevanti Ninan—for 1982 (March 1983)

- Prabha Dutt was 'a lively investigative reporter, particularly on urban affairs. She carried out a relentless battle against corruption and mismanagement of infrastructure.'*

- Sevanti Ninan's 'concern for the poor and deprived led her to remote villages and she analysed various government-sponsored schemes in depth. Her work is a refreshing departure from the normal journalistic writing.'

*Prabha Dutt, chief reporter, *The Hindustan Times*, died prematurely at the height of her career.

Shahnaz Anklesaria and **Shakuntala Narasimhan**—for 1983 (March 1984)

- Shahnaz Anklesaria, 'feature writer and legal correspondent of—*The Statesman*, has shown an out of the ordinary capacity for painstaking investigation covering a wide variety of social concerns. If news is that which arouses and holds the reader's interest, she has strengthened a dimension of contemporary journalism in India by making such topics news and mobilising opinion for constructive change. Her fortnightly column, Women and the Law, has attracted notice as a thoughtful and researched analysis of current problems. (She) has delved deep into the realities of numerous institutions ... and jolted us out of our complacency by portraying their ugliness or utility as much as their larger potential.'
- Shakuntala Narasimhan, former assistant editor of *Femina* and a columnist for the *Deccan Herald*, has specialised in women's issues and consumer affairs. According to the award citation, 'Her work over the years reveals a deep concern for the problems of the consumer, of women, of parents and children as they face the schools of today, and of conditions in hospitals. This concern has risen above focussing attention on issues and building awareness. It has extended to guiding citizens on how and to whom to protest by spelling out the protection the law provides and how the available mechanisms can be activated. By her writings (she) has helped ordinary citizens to recover a measure of their sovereignty.'

Sheela Barse—for 1984 (April 1985)

Sheela Barse, 'a freelance journalist, has shown a welcome social awareness and social thrust in her investigative reports, which give her efforts a dimension larger than mere cold professional competence. Her writings on women and children and on young girls trapped in brothels show depth of feeling and are intended to awaken the conscience of society. Her exposé on children's homes in Maharashtra and the subsequent legal action she initiated resulted, in one instance, in the return of fifty children to their respective homes .... Her meticulously documented reports have stamped her as a journalist with a cause ....”

Madhu Kishwar—for 1985 (April 1986)

Madhu Kishwar is founder-editor of *Manushi*, a journal on women and society in Hindi and English. According to the award citation, ‘(Manushi’s) survival against all odds is a tribute to the persistence, determination and fearlessness of the editor. (She) has shown editorial versatility of a high order. This is seen not merely in her own writings but also in the way she has inspired worthwhile contributions from a new and growing band of concerned writers. Editing a periodical calls for skills both journalistic and managerial. These traits do not always go together. But (she) has proved that she possesses them in ample measure. It has also taken rare courage and commitment to exclude advertisements as many of them exploit the image of women to sell products, and to forgo grants and donations. (She) has prized independence and has used her talents and dedication to articulate the problems, traumas and aspirations of Indian women.’

Kalpana Sharma—for 1986 (March 1987)

Kalpana Sharma was editor of *Himmat* before she moved to ‘mainstream’ journalism, first with *The Indian Express*. According to the award citation, ‘(Her) readers have come to discern a serious and wide-ranging interest in social and economic affairs. To those concerned with and about the condition of women in our society, her writings have carried a ring of truth for their respect for facts and freshness of understanding ... As a writer and thinker she has been an activist among women in the media ... (Her) pursuits of public interest through journalism has been steady, fervent and professional.’

Mangal Khinwasara—for 1987 (March 1988)

Mangal Khinwasara worked with a grassroots non-governmental youth organization in rural Maharashtra before joining the Marathi daily, *Dainik Marathwada*. According to the award citation, ‘It was to hold up the mirror to the deprivation and exploitation of various disadvantaged social groups that (she) moved from social activism to journalism ... (Her) reports reflect courage and initiative. Illiterate and oppressed women have opened their hearts to her and she has captured their tortured lives in simple, down-to-earth, yet imaginative, language ... Her depiction of the struggle of the downtrodden to make an honest living speaks of their fighting spirit and sounds a note of hope and confidence in their will and ability to overcome.'

Tavleen Singh—for 1988 (March 1989)

Tavleen Singh has 'covered a wide variety of subjects, including many of deep social concern, such as the plight of Harijans in Bihar and tensions between different communities. She has treated these subjects perceptively and with controlled passion. She has shown great courage in entering dangerous situations in pursuit of information and understanding. Her work displays independence of judgement and honesty. Despite the gravity of her subjects, she writes with a light touch and often with a sense of humour. These qualities make her an excellent journalist and communicator.'

Chitra Subramaniam and **Nalini Singh**—for 1989 (March 1990)

- Chitra Subramaniam was correspondent for *The Hindu* in Geneva before joining *The Indian Express*. According to the award citation, '(She) has established herself as a courageous, enterprising, tenacious and meticulous investigative journalist ... (Her) relentless pursuit of the truth behind the Bofors gun deal has yielded some of the finest examples of public-spirited journalism. In collaboration with N Ram ... she has unravelled some of the complex financial arrangements connected with a deal whose propriety has deeply exercised the Indian public. Her despatches have been supported by not easily accessible documentary evidence obtained through her exceptional resourcefulness in pursuing a trail that has led to several countries in Europe. The accuracy of these stories has been repeatedly vindicated by subsequent authoritative confirmation. Threats have not deterred her endeavours. In addition to exceptional professional skills and dedication, she has shown a staunch commitment to the values of a clean public life and the people's right to know in a democracy.'
- Nalini Singh has established herself as a perceptive commentator in the print medium and an investigative journalist in the medium of television. According to the citation, 'Her articles on varied facets of rural India and the inequitous manner in which development can be manipulated to the disadvantage of the poor have been widely read and admired.' Her television programme on booth capturing

'accomplished in a cathartic half hour what years of expatiation in the print medium on the criminalization of politics and the abuse of the electoral process in some parts of the country had failed to do. It was broadcast journalism at its best, technically superb and socially and politically timely. In earlier TV reports and documentaries (she) has etched in sharp detail the interfaces between authority and common people.' She has also 'exposed the ugly face of communalism in Bhagalpur.'

Shiraz Sidhwa and **Usha Rai**—for 1990 (March 1991)

- Shiraz Sidhwa worked with *Sunday* and *The Financial Times* (London) before joining the *Far Eastern Economic Review*. According to the award citation, '(She) has earned distinction by the quality of her writing on the traumatic events in Kashmir in the last year. At a time when firsthand information on Kashmir was becoming increasingly difficult to obtain since the official media and the national press had retreated from the region, she was among a handful of journalists who covered the unfolding events with great courage and tenacity. (Her) coverage of Kashmir was remarkable for the consistency with which she reported on major events over the year, capturing the changing landscape, providing important correctives to misleading reports emanating from both official and non-official sources, and providing the kind of information necessary for any informed judgement on the relevant issues.'
- Usha Rai 'has distinguished herself as a journalist by the quality of her work on issues of social concern relating particularly to education, health and the environment. Her incisive analysis of social injustices arising out of everyday practices relating to gender and class is of great significance. By focussing on these issues which lie almost at the edge of society's consciousness of itself, she has contributed richly to the development of a more mature and critical public culture. (She) has consistently worked to overcome the limits (of the mass media) and documented the injustices faced by women, children and other vulnerable sections of society in the course of daily living. She has also brought the work of individuals and institutions engaged in the task of social transformation to public attention.'

Pushpa Girimaji and **Mediastorm**—for 1991 (March 1992)

- Pushpa Girimaji 'has been long dedicated to the cause of consumer awareness and protection. Her regular column in *The Indian*

Express, now more widely syndicated, is written with lucid elegance and has helped educate the general public on market practices, standards, safety norms and consumer rights. The column has contributed to a genre of journalism which has an important role to play, especially in a developing society, in creating critical awareness of the citizen as consumer ....' (The award recognizes) 'the qualities of diligent footwork, research, analysis and communication of relevant information to the reading public that her work achieves'.

- Mediastorm is an audio-visual collective formed in 1986 by six young women: Shohini Ghosh, Sabina Kidwai, Sabeena Gadihoke, Shikha Jain, Charu Gargi and Ranjani Mazumdar .... The collective has shown commendable initiative and courage in producing films on socially relevant themes .... The group has shown exemplary dedication, deep conviction and sensitivity in the use of a relatively new journalistic medium in India for critical commentary on live social and political issues of our times. The fact that the conceptualization and technical and creative aspects of the production have all been handled entirely by the collective on a shoestring budget makes its work the more commendable.'

Sucheta Dalal and **Teesta Setalvad**—for 1992 (March 1993)

- Sucheta Dalal 'broke new ground in uncovering the multi-million rupee stockmarket scam. Through her painstaking efforts, her meticulous regard for detail that characterized her news reports and analytical write-ups, (she) laid bare before the Indian public the complexities and intricacies that shrouded the truth behind the fraudulent dealings in the securities industry. It was (her) persistent campaign on the front and business pages of her newspaper that led to the appointment of the joint committee of Parliament to inquire into and report on the scam. The professional perseverance with which (she) went about the task of ruthlessly exposing the operators, whether these were domestic or foreign banks or public financial institutions, has set a new benchmark in business journalism in India, hitherto regarded as an exclusive male preserve.'
- Teesta Setalvad was a senior correspondent with *Business India* (before co-founding *Communalism Combat*). According to the award citation, '(She) has been a sensitive reporter on gender, social and economic affairs. She was marked out for an exceptional blend of feeling, fairness and courageous clarity while reporting on communal strife in Gujarat and on the Bombay killings of December 1992 and January 1993. Her reportage placed the violence in perspective and

showed professionalism at a time when the atmosphere was socially and emotionally surcharged. Her deep social concern extended beyond the call of duty in her exertions with other civic-minded citizens in a vigilante group for riot victims.'

Sheela Bhatt, Manimala and **Alka Raghuvanshi**—for 1993 (April 1994)

- Sheela Bhatt was founder-editor of the Gujarati journal, *Abbiyan*, before she became editor of the Gujarati edition of *India Today*. According to the award citation, she represents the vanguard of women who broke into the 'mainstream' in Indian language journalism: 'At a time when even well-established papers shied away from ground-level reportage of communal, anti-reservation and similar tensions, (she) made her mark for independence and enterprise in such coverage .... (She) writes with courage, understanding and objectivity and has shown social concern'.
- Manimala was involved in a major student movement for social change before joining the *Navbharat Times* as a journalist. According to the award citation, '(She) has infused her reportage with a rare blend of investigation, insight and empathy. Her consistent critique of the social practices and structures in India that conspire to marginalize women is an exhortation to an alternative praxis—the praxis of empowerment. Her stories follow the trajectory of women's grappling with seemingly insurmountable obstacles to strength and self-affirmation, with a lyricism that is sensitive to both triumph and pain ... Within the interstices of unfeeling convention, (she) explores the creative space for women to take the road less travelled and listen to the beat of a different drum.'
- Alka Raghuvanshi 'combines a high degree of artistic sensibility with journalistic talent. The daily Arts page of *The Pioneer* has come to represent a landmark in newspaper arts coverage, going beyond appreciation to investigation into all aspects of the arts—not excluding its seamier side. This has attracted a wider readership than would have been the case had it been limited to reviews. The Arts page has provided a broad and lively forum for an array of critics and writers from folk to fine art without any attempt at orchestration. Her own writings span an impressive range .... The aim: to get to "the art behind the hype".'

Shubha Singh—for 1994 (March 1995)

Shubha Singh has written extensively on external affairs in *The Pioneer*. According to the award citation, her 'coverage of and commentaries on foreign affairs have been models of clarity and objective analysis. She has a feel for the news as well as the ability to place it in perspective. Her work is well-researched and backgrounded, which enables readers to appreciate the significance and nuances of current events. Her style is direct and unpretentious. A light touch sometimes relieves the serious nature of the themes with which she deals and projects the human face behind those involved in affairs of state.'

Mahila Dakiya and **Patricia Mukhim**—for 1995 (March 1996)

- Mahila Dakiya is a path-breaking contribution to Indian journalism as a broadsheet written, edited and produced by neo-literate rural women in the backward Banda district of Uttar Pradesh. It grew out of the government-initiated Mahila Samakhya programme of education for women's empowerment. The newspaper, in Hindi and Bundeli, is produced and distributed by the women themselves. Apart from being a medium for the self-expression of rural women and the dissemination of information and ideas, it has evolved into a public audit of expenditure on rural development.
- Patricia Mukhim is a school teacher and columnist who belongs to the north-eastern state of Meghalaya and writes for the *Shillong Times* as well as other local papers. According to the award citation, 'She has interpreted the rest of the country to the Northeast and the Northeast to itself. In so doing, she has established a credibility that has enabled her to be scathingly critical of her own society when such criticism is required. It takes tremendous courage and commitment to be as outspoken as Patricia Mukhim has been in a situation where a certain amount of risk attends a critical appraisal of local issues and sentiments and in promoting the Northeast's bonds with the rest of the country.'

Annam Suresh and **Newsline/Rehana Hakim**—for 1996 (April 1997)

- Annam Suresh 'concentrates on women's issues, exposing the callousness and hypocrisy of society. Her vivid account of the utterly shameful sexual exploitation of blind girls, some as young as twelve, by the staff of a government-aided blind school in Calcutta led to suspensions. Until her detailed exposé the media had ignored the scandal. Positive developments are not overlooked ... In an environment favouring instant journalism, it is rare to find sensitive writing combined with patient field research. Both are needed to convey glimpses of the human condition that touch the readers' feelings with the stark reality of the situation described. Suresh's perceptive eye for detail is more effective than heavy editorialising ... In reporting (social issues), Suresh lives up to the ideals of the Chameli Devi Jain Award.'

- 'The Media Foundation is proud to confer on *Newsline* and its editor, Rehana Hakim, the 1947–97 Golden Jubilee Chameli Devi Jain Award honouring an Outstanding South Asian Women's Media Collective. *Newsline*, a Pakistani journalists' collective, was founded by the late Razia Bhatti in 1989 and run largely by a dedicated band of women. It defied conformity to assert editorial independence. In the seven years of its existence it has taken its place at the vanguard of South Asian journalism through its courageous reportage and analyses. Razia Bhatti's untimely death in 1995 was a tragic loss that was mourned beyond Pakistan. However, *Newsline* did not falter and has continued to pursue its mission under Rehana Hakim.'

Anita Pratap—for 1997 (March 1998)

Anita Pratap 'began her career in print, reporting for *The Indian Express*. But her talent and eagerness to undertake dangerous assignments and to probe deeper was perhaps better suited to magazine journalism. It is no surprise that she moved, first to *Sunday*, then to *India Today* and thence to the American newsmagazine, *Time*. She crossed over to the visual media when CNN appointed her bureau chief for South Asia, based in Delhi. It was not long before she won the 1996 George Polk award together with Christine Amanpour for their special feature titled "Battle for Afghanistan". The Media Foundation is proud to honour and recognize her sensitive portrayal of the human and social condition.'

Pamela Philipose, Vasavi and **Homai Vyarawalla**—for 1998 (March 1999)

- Pamela Philipose 'has gained a wide readership for her repertoire of notable contributions to the pages of *The Indian Express*, where she is senior editor and was earlier editor of the *Express* magazine. Her writings display skills and interests, combining depth, analytical insights and humour, a rare combination in Indian journalism.' In addition to investigative field reports, she has written impassioned columns of opinion and editorials focussed on a variety of social concerns. 'If well-researched and closely argued despatches are telling, pungent humour can be devastating. Philipose's regular Sunday column, Straight Face, conjures up powerful cartoons in prose ... (and) has gained a devoted following ... The Media Foundation is privileged to honour Philipose as a journalist of quality and versatility. Her work has prised open scarce political space and added a dimension to social discourse on issues that matter.'

- Vasavi, 'an activist freelancer writing for *Prabhat Khabar* of Ranchi, her home-town, and *Jansatta*, Delhi, harvests both ... It is journalists like Vasavi that mirror the Other India. She has over the past five years focussed attention on the causes and concerns of the adivasis of Chota Nagpur and the Santhal Parganas, filing stories and writing tracts that have enhanced understanding of adivasis and adivasi women ... She has been able to project the voice of the marginalized, combining vision and social commitment rooted in an activist stance. Her writings on the Jharkhand struggle portray a deep understanding of the tribal psyche and habitat. While writing with great empathy and respect for the tribal way of life, she has also turned the searchlight on negative trends ... In bestowing on her the Chameli Devi Jain Award, the Media Foundation recognizes a voice that cries out not from the wilderness but which will surely prevail in the service of those for whom she speaks.'
- Homai Vyrawalla 'has played a pioneering role in promoting photojournalism in India over an entire lifetime. Now retired in Baroda at a sprightly 86, Vyarawalla ... took to the camera as an amateur in Bombay in the 1930s. She soon turned professional, graduating from assisting her photographer-husband-to-be to becoming a well-known photojournalist in her own right ... (She took up) an assignment with the Far Eastern Bureau of the British Information Service in Delhi in 1942 which eminently positioned her to record the historic finale of the freedom struggle and the first, rosy decades of Independence thereafter ... By then she had turned freelancer. She was a familiar figure on the news circuit, "one of the boys", and earned the respect of her peers by her professionalism and determination to beat the competition. Vyarawalla remains the 'First Lady of Indian Photojournalism', as she has been well described. The Media Foundation is proud to salute her.'

Barkha Dutt — for 1999 (April 2000)

'The trauma and triumph of (the) Kargil (conflict) was vividly portrayed from the front by Barkha Dutt for NDTV. Some months later she was again among the very first to bring home to a stricken nation the enormity of the terrible super-cyclone that devastated coastal Orissa. Barkha Dutt was already a familiar figure as an NDTV anchor and reporter. The live coverage of Kargil and Orissa made her a household name. Kargil was India's first television war... Orissa was another kind of story of untold human suffering at the hands of nature's fury. Television is a powerful and heady medium. It requires sensitivity and integrity in the pictorial and narrative presentation to ensure that the camera does not lie or merely titillate but tells all of the story as it is, and what lies before and beyond the pictures. Coverage of these contrasting events reflects a sensibility, stamina and skill that growingly informs the work of Barkha Dutt. Her reportage during 1999 ranged from investigating discrimination against Dalits in Delhi, to Kashmir and Pakistan and covering general elections, apart from anchoring the News at Nine and Newshour on NDTV... It is entirely appropriate that she follows in the footsteps of her late mother, Prabha, who received the 1982 Award.'

The Kachchh Mahila Vikas Sanghathan — for 2000 (March 2001)

'The Media Foundation's Chameli Devi Award goes once again to a women's collective ... for its innovative and pioneering community radio initiative for rural development over All India Radio, Bhuj. The KMVS federates 150 village units and has employed its weekly radio docu-drama serial, *Kunjal Paanje Kachchh Ji,* together with a simply produced newsletter in the local Kachchhi dialect transliterated in the Gujarati script, to promote community-based action for self-improvement among a largely illiterate population living in an extremely harsh environment. It uses the well-loved folk symbol of the Sarus Crane as 'sutradhar' to anchor the programme, thereby harnessing a sense of Kachcchi identity and cultural pride, evoking a rich oral tradition and musical forms ... to generate a positive gender and development discourse that aims to explore and mobilize community effort within the framework of local reality. Though technically assisted by an Ahmedabad NGO, Drishti, all the programmes are a result of participatory effort and rendered into the local idiom by the Sangathan members, who sing and otherwise take part in the production. ... The Media Foundation salutes KMVS for making local radio work for local benefit and developing a communication model worthy of emulation elsewhere.

Bano Megolhusau Haralu — for 2001 (April 2002)

Bano M Haralu, a daughter of Nagaland, has earned distinction as NDTV's News Bureau Chief and special correspondent in Guwahati, from where she covers the seven Northeastern states. She cut her teeth in Doordarshan and became its Northeastern correspondent, anchoring the first TV electoral coverage of the region in 1991 before taking up her present assignment. She reports from the field on politics and insurgency, as well as about environment and development issues, with skill and sensitivity. Bano Haralu has distinguished herself as a journalist in two ways. She has shown professional commitment in a part of the country difficult to cover in many ways, winning the respect of diverse and oftentimes estranged elements in a highly plural society. She has also deftly navigated the storms and perils of working in daunting circumstances in zones of conflict, even-handedly communicating the problems, aspirations and frustrations of the people. The Media Foundation is privileged to honour Bano Haralu ... for interpreting the Northeast to itself and the rest of India with devotion and integrity through her chosen profession of television journalism.

Shikha Trivedi — for 2002-03 (March 2003)

As television reporting gets increasingly stereotyped and, at times, aggressive, Shikha Trivedi of New Delhi Television stands out as markedly different. She casts a watchful eye on the social scene that is unbiased and carefully balanced. Accompanied by her camera crew, she has ventured into the neglected rural unknown to interview the poor and underprivileged. This she does with sympathy, making the lowly speak for themselves, naturally and without inhibition, by showing that she cares and has taken the trouble to understand their problems and apprehensions. Shikha speaks in soft yet firm tones, with a simple statement of facts and a gift of understatement that is more telling than loud comments or editorialising that often mar such reports. She is able to combine news values with perceptive analysis, overcoming the limitations of the medium. The Gujarat riots that disfigured India ... produced much good and vivid writing and reportage. Shikha Trivedi's was among the best: insightful, sensitive and well researched, reaching beyond the horizon to small, disadvantaged, forgotten communities. She had a decade earlier written incisively about Ayodhya, co-authoring a book entitled *'The Invention of Nationality*: *Ramjanambhoomi Movement and Fear of the Self.*' Whether during the tragic Gujarat earthquake or in more placid times, Shikha Trivedi is more often than not to be found in some unmapped area or situation that others have overlooked or ignored. It is this steady pursuit of India's endemic problems, removed from the glare of bright city lights and rhetorical froth, which makes her reporting so distinctive and worthwhile.

Khabar Lahariya, Chitrakoot — for 2003-04 (March 2004)

Information is empowering and that has given voice to tribal, dalit and other marginalized groups in the backwaters of Uttar Pradesh through the remarkable endeavours of the rural women's collective in Chitrakoot that produces *Khabar Lahariya*. The twenty-two-month-old fortnightly has literally created waves, transforming passive, neo-literate communities into maturing citizens aware of their rights and seeking participation and accountability in governance. The imprint line of *Khabar Lahariya* lists Meera, Meena, Sonia, Kavita, Shanti, Krishna and others among its 'barefoot "patrakars".' They report, edit, design, illustrate, publish and sell the paper with inspirational support from NIRANTAR, a resource group devoted to education and gender issues. Information is valued and the print run of *Khabar Lahariya* is now 1300 copies. These are sold in 190 of Chitrakoot's 300 villages and in fifteen other districts in UP and Madhya Pradesh at Rs 2.50. Coverage extends to national and global events ... while focussing on local issues, corruption, violence, oppression, development and official releases and pronouncements. Readers offer their views. The language, Bundeli, has a simplicity and directness that would be the envy of big city editors. The Media Foundation salutes *Khabar Lahariya's* pioneering effort and is proud to acknowledge the dedication, courage and talent of the Chitrakoot Women's Collective through the Chameli Devi Jain Award for an Outstanding Women's Media Collective.

Sonu Jain — for 2003-04 (March 2004)

Sonu Jain has the gift of translating what others may see as simple, ordinary events and processes into news that makes readers stop to think, pushes those in authority to act and stirs courts to intervene. Currently reporting for the *Indian Express* from Delhi, she refrains from editorializing ... but lets facts and analysis tell the story. She is a crusader who knows where to draw the line between being an observer and an activist, so that credibility is not lost. Sonu Jain writes with elegance and researched knowledge on the environment, agriculture and rights issues, going to the scene of action and patiently investigating and sifting the evidence. Her tenacious follow-up of Satyendra Dubey's killing by a corrupt mafia in Bihar stirred the nation's conscience. Many of her stories have resulted in public interest litigation and other interventions in a bid to set things right. She has given a new dimension to agricultural reporting by bringing together stories of innovation and success from all over the country in a fortnightly page that she edits called 'From the field'. They tell of little miracles that are changing and moving rural India, giving wing to new ideas and initiatives. Sonu Jain's sustained high-quality reportage has earned her a devoted readership and makes her eminently deserving of the Chameli Devi Jain Award for an Outstanding Woman Mediaperson.

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'When women begin to claim their own space, define their own issues and agendas and mobilize themselves for equal participation in the public and professional sphere, it greatly strengthens democratic practice in society... ultimately it is the voices and experiences of women themselves, varied, strong and independent, which can show the way ahead.'
—FROM THE FOREWORD BY NIRMALA LAKSHMAN

Making News: Women in Journalism brings together the personal stories and professional assessments of more than 200 women, including familiar names such as Bachi Karkaria, Kalpana Sharma, Malini Parthasarathy, Mrinal Pande, Shobhaa Dé and Tavleen Singh. Capturing the experiences, opinions and distinct attitudes of a wide range of female journalists in print media, this book offers key insights into their views on their profession in general, as well as their perceptions of their own individual roles.

Ammu Joseph, a long-time media consultant and observer, analyses the various ways in which gender and gender-related issues affect women in journalism, and presents a frank and forthright picture of the ups and downs of this fascinating field. She traces the history of women's involvement in the mainstream media and probes the diverse perspectives of women working in different parts of the country, in various languages, in both small towns and big cities—some just starting out in their careers and others who are already well established. Their voices reflect a gamut of complex issues—from sexual harassment at the workplace to marginalization and discrimination in a largely male-dominated profession.

In recent years substantial numbers of women have opted for, and achieved great success in, journalism. However, as an occupation it has not received intensive scrutiny from within the profession, by women journalists themselves. *Making News* delves into the ground realities, as well as the exciting possibilities, of a career in print media.

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